

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`


The New York
Public Library





THE HIDDEN THINGS





THE HIDDEN THINGS

BY
J. WESLEY PUTNAM
AUTHOR OF "WHOSO FINDETH A WIFE"

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY
1915

8535

Copyright, 1915, by
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

Press of
J. J. Little & Ives Co.
New York

PREFACE

"THE next time the novelist rings the bell I will not stir though the meeting-house burn down," said Thoreau. Other men of the contemplative habit of mind besides the Concord ascetic have scorned the reading of fiction—among them Thomas Carlyle, who exclaims in "Past and Present," "Fiction, 'Imagination,' 'Imaginative Poetry,' etc., etc., except as a vehicle for truth, or *fact* of some sort,—which surely a man should first try other ways of vehiculating, and conveying safe,—what is it? Let the Minerva and other presses respond!—"

Now, because Harold Bell Wright has repeatedly rung the bell, and because an astonishing number of people have come together to hear what he has to say, *literati* of various sorts have been thrown into a twitter of excitement, and wonder—and protest. With all the vehemence at their command they have decried what they term Harold Bell Wright's melodrama, his sentimentality, his exaggeration, his uneven workmanship; and not content with branding him with these marks of their disapproval, some of these agitated

writers have even gone so far as to impugn the motives of the man.

In a recent contribution to the *Atlantic Monthly*, no less a figure than Mr. Owen Wister, who himself rang the bell—once (with "The Virginian")—deliberately attacked Mr. Wright's latest book, "The Eyes of the World," as a "quack-novel." And after stigmatizing "quack-novels" as "stale, distorted, a sham, a puddle of words, mildewed pap," Mr. Wister proceeds with this illuminating observation: "We have seen already why money is a target at present so thickly shot at by quack-novelists; they assail money in hopes to fill their own pockets with it." There appears to be the crux of the whole matter. In this highly diverting article, which Mr. Wister entitles "Quack-Novels and Democracy," and in which he assumes to point out that what is (to him) the shocking literary taste of American readers is due to the ignoble fact that our ancestors struggled against the wilderness and fought the Indians, about one-third of the total of fourteen pages is devoted to the high crimes and misdemeanors of Harold Bell Wright. To be sure, Mr. Wright is not attacked alone. Mr. Robert Chambers, Mr. Gouverneur Morris, and Mr. Upton Sinclair are tarred with the same brush. But when a writer sets out ostensibly to trace the relations of cause and effect, arguing democracy as the cause of what he is pleased to term "quack-novels," and devotes an entire

third of his effort to an arraignment of one particular author, there is only one inference possible. Strip Mr. Wister's article of its cloak of introduction and conclusion; expose the bare framework of the structure—and what stands forth as the real character of the essay? . . . Vituperation of Harold Bell Wright!

It is indeed a sad commentary on the state of magazine publishing when the virtuous *Atlantic Monthly* lends its chaste columns to such use. In its defense of itself, however, the *Atlantic* can cite plenty of precedents. For instance, its illustrious forerunner, *Blackwood's Magazine,* attacked the poet Keats as unworthy. You see, the proceeding is by no means new.

What is perhaps the next most notable onslaught on Mr. Wright and his works may be found in the *Bookman* of January, 1915, over the signature of Mr. Frederic Taber Cooper. So far as our observation goes, Mr. Cooper has himself never rung the bell even once. But since ringing the bell is, necessarily, a profitable feat, possibly Mr. Cooper could, like Mr. Wister, survive the ignominy of one such performance. But to be a consistent bell-ringer, like Harold Bell Wright—perish the thought!

At the close of his three-page essay, which he heads "The Popularity of Harold Bell Wright," Mr. Cooper concludes as follows: "He (Harold Bell Wright) writes badly, he is blatantly, even grotesquely, false to life, his technique is a thing to weep over,—but

somehow or other, he does make the reader see. It is a common platitude of the stage that an audience believes the most incongruous, impossible things because it sees them happen. Well, that is the way with Harold Bell Wright's printed motion pictures. We *see* them happen."

Apropos of such criticism as the foregoing, it is not out of place to recall the anecdote of that master-painter, Whistler, who, when informed by an acquaintance that one of his paintings was "very bad," remonstrated—"Don't say that! Say *you think* it is bad!"

We may not quarrel with such criticism of Mr. Wright as springs from the playful pen of the scrivener, Mr. Franklin P. Adams ("F. P. A." of "Colyum" fame), who in his "Ode to a Train Boy" warbles the following warning:

"But please, an you value your carcass—
Unless you are fain for a fight—
Unless you would die, do not ask me to buy
The novels of Harold Bell Wright.
.
But pray, put a check to ambition,
Don't ask me again, or I'll bite;
O boy, you'll compel me to shoot if you sell me
The novels of Harold Bell Wright."

Mr. Adams does not like Mr. Wright's books. Probably he *thinks* they are bad. But thinking so,

he does not make the sweeping assertion that they *are* bad—he does not launch forth in a tirade against the matter itself; neither does he attribute mercenary motives to the author.

The attention of those other literary gentlemen, of less generous make-up, is respectfully directed to these extracts from "Fiction—Fair and Foul," by that John the Baptist of literature and art—yes, and of *living*, too—John Ruskin:

"Fictitious! I use the ambiguous word deliberately; for it is impossible to distinguish in these tales of the prison-house how far their vice and gloom are thrown into their manufacture only to meet a vile demand, and how far they are an integral condition of thought in the minds of men trained from their youth up in the knowledge of Londonian and Parisian misery. . . .

"The reader will perhaps be surprised at my separating the greatest work of Dickens, 'Oliver Twist,' with honor, from the loathsome mass to which it typically belongs. That book is an earnest and uncaricatured record of states of criminal life, written with didactic purpose, full of the gravest instruction, nor destitute of pathetic studies of noble passion." And on a later page, as he warms to his subject, Ruskin exclaims, with splendid scorn—"There is no God, but have we not invented gunpowder?—who wants a God, with that in his pocket? There is no Resurrec-

tion, neither angel nor spirit; but have we not paper and pens, and cannot every blockhead print his opinions, and the Day of Judgment become Republican, with everybody for a judge, and the flat of the universe for the throne?"

Respectfully submitted for the further consideration of Messrs. Wister, Cooper, *et al.:*

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (I Corinthians 4.5.)

Harold Bell Wright is not the only preacher of practical Christianity who has been branded as a charlatan. He has, at least, the satisfaction of knowing that he is one of a noble company. The list of maligned savers of souls, reaching as it does from St. Paul to Billy Sunday, is a long one. And among the five millions who have read Mr. Wright's books, if one individual has been raised to a higher plane of endeavor, who shall say that his work has been in vain? Who shall throw—not the first—but further stones? In all this great land, from the pine forests of Maine to the mighty sequoia groves of California, from the ceaseless roll of the Gulf of Mexico to the barrier of the Great Lakes—aye! and still northwards—who shall say that Harold Bell Wright has not wielded a mighty power for good?

What though his methods be not those that the colleges teach? What though he has reaped, incidentally, a pecuniary reward for his unceasing toil? What though there be scores of writers envious of his success? Shall any one of these things detract one whit from what he has accomplished, and what—God willing!—he shall still accomplish for the betterment of his fellow men?

To the voices raised against Harold Bell Wright, this book, however lame, however halting, however lacking, stands as a protest. And at no far distant day, let it be hoped that some champion girt with a stouter sword will rise to his defense.

THE AUTHOR

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Out of the Chrysalis	17
II.	A Glimpse of the Game	31
III.	Skirmishing	45
IV.	Hasbrook Reconnoitres	60
V.	Old Pals	82
VI.	A Few Disclosures	94
VII.	Strange Bedfellows	109
VIII.	Launcelot or Galahad?	129
IX.	The Joy-Riders	145
X.	The Changing Horizon	165
XI.	Alan Misses Something	180
XII.	The Impossible Happens	188
XIII.	A Pretty Co-respondent	203
XIV.	Side-Lights on Modern Marriage	215
XV.	Near the Sky	230





THE HIDDEN THINGS



THE HIDDEN THINGS

CHAPTER I

OUT OF THE CHRYSALIS

It was very late; but the wide-eyed and heavy-lidded young person, who was at the same time under-clothed and over-dressed, did not mind at all. She was, obviously, of the sort not easily disconcerted.

It was shockingly late. Except for the oblong of light which penetrated the white Holland shade of Emily Fraser's bedroom, there was not another house on Ruggles Street that showed the slightest sign of life. East Oldport was sunk into its customary sodden, virtuous sleep —just as it had been at that hour (which was well past midnight) on almost every night during every one of the two hundred and seventy-odd years of its existence. If there were excep-

tions—now and then—to East Oldport's chronic state of nocturnal coma, it was because some citizen's house took fire, or a ship, caught in a storm, sent up signals of distress off the Head, or—in the old Puritan days—an Indian raid threatened.

And now, since no redskin had disturbed the sleepy New England village for a matter of two hundred years, East Oldport might be said to pursue the even tenor of its way without any interruptions other than those effected by the agencies of fire and water. *Fire-water,* happily, had no place in East Oldport's calculations; for East Oldport was uncompromisingly committed to the great American institution of "no-license." No roisterers disturbed the midnight or early morning slumbers of East Oldport. The village was—at all events, externally—everything its early settlers could have hoped and prayed that it would be.

Emily Fraser was herself stealthily conscious of a feeling of guilt that she should still be awake at twelve-fifty A. M. Emily was reading

—devouring the most recent issue of the *International Magazine*. She glanced apprehensively at the nickel alarm clock that ticked unromantically upon her small table. But late as it was, Emily was determined to finish her story. "Out of the Chrysalis" was the title of that entrancing bit of fiction—the brain-child of the famous writer, Taylor Thorpe.

As Emily at last reached the end of the alluring tale she laid the copy of the *International* carefully upon her little table, so that the aforementioned young person, with abnormally large eyes set abnormally far apart, who decked out its cover, must needs feast her impossible orbs upon no more enthralling a prospect than the white ceiling of Emily's low room. But Emily was blissfully oblivious of any slight she may have imposed upon the creation of the famous magazine artist, Mr. Hamilton Howard. Emily was, in truth, too thoroughly enrapt by the ideas which "Out of the Chrysalis" had inspired in her, to be held accountable.

It was a story of the metropolis (the editor

of the *International* was well aware of the lure that New York holds for "hicks," as he always called them). Ubiquitous taxicabs, dashing madly about brilliantly lighted streets; statuesque girls, perfectly gowned, and accompanied by faultlessly groomed millionaires, forever dining in brilliantly lighted restaurants; theaters, brilliantly lighted; roof gardens, brilliantly lighted; dance halls, brilliantly lighted; and then, interposed somewhere among all that glare, one or two scenes in a darker setting, for which the lurid descriptions of the author, Mr. Taylor Thorpe, provided sufficient illumination —all these properties lent to such stories a charm peculiarly their own. In this particular instance, Mr. Taylor Thorpe, using his pet formula, as outlined above (and approved by the editor of the *International*), had happened upon an arrangement of his puppets which appealed strongly to Emily Fraser. The heroine of "Out of the Chrysalis" was an artist—marvelously beautiful, marvelously gifted, marvelously successful. And there were certain reasons why

Emily Fraser could not help visualizing herself in the rôle of Mr. Thorpe's lay-figure—not that she thought too well of her looks (though she was unquestionably pretty, with her chestnut hair, her blue eyes, and a clear skin—touched on the cheeks by a faint red) and not that she approved, at all, of some of the actions of Mr. Thorpe's heroine, but because she had what East Oldport had always called "talent." Emily was, to put it briefly, a bit of an artist herself.

As a child she had amused herself by drawing pictures. And as she grew older she had always seized what time she could from the duties imposed upon her by school and by home, to make sketches and studies. House-servants being the exception rather than the rule in East Oldport homes, it was thought fitting and proper that growing girls should perform what was considered their share of the daily drudgery. The Frasers were poor—even judged by East Oldport standards; and Emily's girlhood, therefore, was little more than one long succes-

sion of dreary tasks—unrelieved except for such golden moments as she might snatch to devote herself to her drawing.

She was virtually self-taught. And it must be admitted that in the circumstances her efforts were not at all discreditable. They had, indeed, awakened the enthusiasm of the eminent American illustrator, Van Wyck Mercer, who had once inadvertently spent a summer at East Oldport. Mercer had examined the contents of Emily's portfolio, and noting her good looks, he had praised her work and advised her to "go to New York." She still cherished his card, as well as his advice; and also the expressed wish that she "look him up" when she arrived in "the little old town."

There that particular episode ended—apparently. Emily had never succeeded in reaching New York. And "Van" Mercer, as his friends called him, never again permitted his doctor to send him to any such haven of repair for frayed nerves as East Oldport. Mercer considered the remedy worse than the complaint.

But Emily still kept Mercer's card, laid carefully beneath a neat pile of handkerchiefs in the top drawer of her painted dresser. There was no telling when she would want to use it.

As Emily relinquished the copy of the *International* she decided that the time had come. And the next morning she broke the news to John Fraser and his wife. At first they only looked at her in a dazed fashion when she made her startling announcement. And even after they had somewhat collected their wits they were only able to protest weakly.

"Oh! I wouldn't go to New York, Emily," Mrs. Fraser said. "You don't want to go to New York."

But Emily did want to go—most decidedly.

"It's a big undertaking," John Fraser said; and he shook his head despairingly, as if the project were quite beyond his comprehension—as indeed it was.

"I'm going!" Emily declared firmly. "What's there for me to do here? I can keep on clerking in Butler's store for eight dollars

a week, until I get old, and I'm turned off. Or I can slave in the hat-factory at ten, until I wear out and break down.

"But if I go to New York I can make a career for myself. And it's work that pays well, too. Why! they say a good illustrator gets one or two hundred dollars for a single drawing!"

There was really no argument against that. And the upshot of the matter was that after an interval of some ten days Emily Fraser set forth for Van Wyck Mercer's "little old town."

Emily did not expect to bring herself before his attention at the start. She preferred to make her own beginnings in the metropolis. But once established, she thought that it might be pleasant to meet Mercer as a fellow-artist; and it was dedicated to just that contingency that his card traveled to the city with her.

So Emily became a hall-room dweller—on a shabby street on the West Side. But neither the dinginess of her boarding-house, nor the vil-

laimous odors, compounded in the main of kitchen smells and leaking gas, which assailed her whenever she returned from a venture into the world outside—these did not in the least discourage her. For she was not faint-hearted. Indeed, she had a magnificent courage, born of her will to succeed, of her ambition, of her belief in herself, and of the optimism of youth. Were such minor discomforts as unpalatable meals, a cold room, a cracked water-pitcher—were such trivialities to stand between her and fame?

Emily's first step was to go to the Public Library and compile a list of publishers. And this preliminary accomplished, she sallied forth, with her portfolio of drawings hugged under her arm, in quest of her first commission.

Her first day's experiences were somewhat disappointing. The result of her first week's efforts were depressing. Her first month's accomplishments were positively nil—anomalous as the expression may seem. And at last Emily began to realize that fame and fortune do not

always respond promptly to every neophyte who knocks at their doors.

It was with a feeling almost of reverence that Emily climbed the broad stairs of the famous publishing house of Strothers Brothers—that first day she set forth on her quest. But as time wore on she was conscious of no such awed sense of the worship of things literary and artistic when she entered the portals of the New York publishers. Nothing had come under her observation to convince her that publishers were either the one thing or the other.

To be sure, it was seldom that Emily succeeded in penetrating beyond the outer environs of any of the offices she visited. The waiting-rooms were open to her, it is true. And she became well acquainted with them. There was the spacious, prosperous-appearing anteroom of the Stapleton Company, with framed original drawings on its walls, and an Oriental rug upon its floor, upon which stood a massive table bearing specimens of the publications of the Stapleton Company. Curiously enough, there were no

chairs—an oversight, doubtless, on the part of the Stapletons, Emily decided. She had not discovered that favored callers were spirited into another sumptuous room, where the matter of chairs had not been forgotten.

Starting with Strothers Brothers, and working down through her list until she reached the small, unimportant and struggling house of Thompson Starr, Incorporated, which could afford no waiting-room at all, but was forced to admit its callers into Mr. Starr's immediate presence, Emily discovered publishers' offices of all sorts and conditions. And in all she received the unvarying answer, that "they had no work to give out just then." Sometimes the message was transmitted by a scrubby office boy, sometimes by a much be-coiffured stenographer; and now and then—though it was seldom—those well-worn words came direct from the lips of the "art editor" himself.

At first Emily was encouraged when some art editor assured her that he would "keep her card, and let her know if there should be any

opportunity for her, later." But that, she was finally obliged to admit to herself, was nothing but the art editor's stereotyped way of dismissing her, both from his office and from his mind.

Not only were commissions at one or two hundred dollars a drawing absolutely unprocurable; commissions at any price seemed as far from her attainment as they had when she "clerked" in Butler's store, in East Oldport.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment of all was the *International* itself. Emily had entered the quarters of that successful magazine with a feeling as if there, at last, she would meet with some tangible encouragement. It seemed as if the *International* must, in some occult fashion, be sensible of the bond between them—between it and her. But the *International's* art editor sent out word that he was busy, and that he was "not in the market" for any drawings. It was a bitter blow—and the one that told most of all the bitter blows that Emily received.

Gradually she ceased trying to convince the great publishers that they had need of her tal-

ent. The little fry, at least, seemed more disposed to weigh her capabilities. That was because they knew she could command only the most meager of starvation prices for her work.

So she persevered; and at last came her first commission.

Mr. Thompson Starr (Incorporated) was the one who finally perceived that Emily could be of service to him. He made a shrewd bargain with her for a set of pen-and-ink illustrations for a children's book. There were to be some twenty drawings in all. And for these Emily was to receive—not one or two hundred dollars for each, but one hundred dollars for the whole lot.

It was better than nothing; and she set to work. And in the course of three weeks' time she had executed her commission. Mr. Starr expressed himself as well pleased with her efforts, for which he had bargained so hardly. Why he had not offered her a higher price Emily was totally unable to discover, for Mr.

Starr never paid her a penny of the sum agreed upon.

Emily's slender funds had vanished. She owed her landlady for two weeks' board; and already another week was rushing to its dreaded termination. And Mrs. Meehan, unerring in the diagnosis of a lodger's financial distress, regarded Emily with a cold and forbidding eye. It was then that Emily bethought herself of Van Wyck Mercer's card.

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE OF THE GAME

Van Wyck Mercer, the popular illustrator, was lunching with Mr. Todd of the famous publishing house of Tillotson & Todd. At Todd's suggestion they had met at the restaurant of the Café des Artistes, in order to discuss the matter of illustrations for Taylor Thorpe's forthcoming novel, "Children of Chance."

"I'll send a set of proofs around to your studio this afternoon," Mr. Todd said. "You'd better read it, in this case, before you make your rough sketches. We don't want the column writers to guy us too much in the newspapers because the drawings don't fit the story. The humorists are pretty active at our expense, just now."

"All right! I'll run through the galleys,"

Mercer promised, as he downed his second cocktail—"just to make sure of the color of the heroine's hair, and to see whether the villain drinks high-balls or dripped absinthe."

Mr. Todd nodded approvingly.

"That's the idea," he said. "Then go ahead and select the passages for your pictures. And be sure you pick something with plenty of punch. The public is tired of the pretty girl stuff. They want action. Pep's what they're looking for. . . . You'll find enough of it in the book—it's a hummer—has 'The Bridal Path' beaten to a frazzle." "The Bridal Path" was Taylor Thorpe's most recently perpetrated monstrosity.

Mercer lighted a cigarette.

"Tell me something about the story," he said. "I don't want to waste any more time than I have to over the proof. You've read the yarn, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!" Todd answered. "I read it coming in on the train this morning—most of it. And believe me—Thorpe has delivered the

goods this time. You see, we told him he'd have to make the next one stronger. His sales had begun to fall off. It's the movies, of course. They give the people action—always something doing. And the only way to make a novel sell these days is to stick stuff in it that the movie people don't dare put across. That's what will make a book go. And Thorpe has done it!"

Warming to his subject, Mr. Todd, of the famous publishing house of Tillotson & Todd, proceeded to spread the loathsome mess before his companion.

"There!" he said, when he had finished. "That's the gist of the thing. And I leave it to you to make the most of your opportunities."

"Trust me!" said Mercer, as he attacked an entrée. "There's just one thing, though, that may cause me some trouble. . . . You say the heroine is young and unsophisticated, in the beginning? It's the very devil, Todd, to find a model of that type any longer. Fact is, they just can't be had, sometimes. Why mayn't I begin my illustrations at some point in the book

where the lady has had the early bloom of innocence rubbed off a bit?"

The famous publisher shook his head.

"That won't do at all," he protested. "Don't you know by this time, my dear fellow, that we always make it a rule to crowd the beginning and the end of a novel with illustrations? A man picking up a copy in a bookshop looks at the start of the story; and a woman looks at the finish of it. Nobody bothers about the middle. That's where we put it over on the public. Skimp the middle, but let 'em find pictures where they're likely to look. . . . No! you've got to make at least a couple of drawings showing the girl fresh, young and innocent."

"Damn!" said Van Wyck Mercer, with a wry face.

"Oh, fake it!" said Todd, cheerfully. "Hair done low in the neck—tennis racket in her hand—a simple little frock! *You* know how!"

But the artist was pessimistic. He was well aware of his own limitations. Too many financially prosperous years spent in depicting ladies

of questionable caste for Tillotson & Todd, the *International Magazine,* and other concerns which strove to give the public what they thought it craved, had wrought havoc with Van Mercer. One cannot grovel in dirt without becoming soiled. And Mercer's prostitution of his art (for he had been an illustrator of promise) had not only coarsened his moral fiber, but had tinged all his work with uncleanliness. It was only by the utmost effort that he could any longer manage to portray a woman as spiritually wholesome. And the feat—for it had become such for him—could be accomplished only by his finding a model of the spiritual, as opposed to the sensual, type and lashing himself to the duty of drawing her slavishly, exactly as she was. He could no longer trust his imagination. The moment he permitted himself to deviate from the literal features of the model, in that moment he stamped the study with the mark of the beast.

Van Mercer had achieved wonderful facility in portraying the fleshly, sensuous, vapid, fash-

ionable woman. And he had so schooled his reflexes in the paths of vicious habit that they had become his master.

Mercer let that particular phase of his conference with Mr. Todd pass without further comment. He was like a drug-user who hides his infirmity. He shrank from confessing his inability to throw off his habit of vicious work. But he knew that those two drawings that Todd insisted upon having would cost him more effort than all the rest of the commission.

For a moment the undertaking seemed too much for him. He was tempted to tell Todd that he was too busy to complete the drawings as soon as the publisher wanted them. But Mercer needed the money. It struck him that he always needed money. Though his yearly earnings ran well into five figures, with him it was a case of easy come, easy go. His ill-gotten funds slipped through his fingers as quickly as they filter through the soiled hands of the gambler, the grafter, or any of the unspeakable creatures of prey who infest the earth. Van

Mercer had a well-deserved reputation for tossing away his money.

After leaving the Café des Artistes, Mercer and his patron walked a few blocks up the Avenue together, until Todd waved a farewell at a corner in the Forties, to hurry back to his office.

The artist strolled an alone. There was plenty to interest him, for the pavement was thronged. And Mercer's practiced eyes fell appraisingly upon maid and matron. Was it entirely Van Mercer's fault that he saw in all that crowd no face which bespoke the possession, by its owner, of a pure soul? Had he sunk so low, spiritually, that he could no longer recognize the good, the noble? He met dozens of girls from whom he could have contrived magazine covers that would have sent the art editor of the *International* into raptures. But if he had been obliged to pick, out of that galaxy on the Avenue, a model who would serve his purpose in drawing two illustrations of a fresh young maiden for Tillotson & Todd, Mercer told him-

self, with a smothered curse, that he would have had to 'phone Todd that the thing was impossible.

In no agreeable frame of mind he swung off to the westward. And soon he entered an expensive structure, overlooking Central Park, the great windows of which proclaimed it to be a studio apartment house.

Once inside his quarters Mercer replaced his coat with an artist's smock frock. And picking up his address-book he turned over the leaves in the hope of finding the name of some forgotten model who would answer his pressing requirements. He was still searching, when a boy from Tillotson & Todd's arrived with the galley proof of "Children of Chance."

Mercer spent a half hour digesting Mr. Taylor Thorpe's latest tidbit. And then he turned once more to his book of addresses. He had just opened it again when Saunders, the young man who acted as half errand boy, half secretary, for him, told him there was a lady to see him.

"What's she want?" asked Mercer.

"Here's her card," said the other. "I think she's a friend of yours."

Van Mercer looked at the bit of pasteboard. "'Fraser!' . . . Never heard of her! . . . 'Illustrator!' . . . Humph! . . . What's this, in pencil? . . . 'East Oldport!' . . . Prob'ly I met her there—though that was years ago. . . . Well! show the illustrator in, Saunders."

He did not remember her at all, though he declared he was delighted to see her again. And he asked so many pleasant questions about East Oldport that Emily Fraser soon felt that she had at last found a real friend. She was sorry that she had not come to see Mr. Mercer before.

Seated in a great carved chair, made comfortable with many cushions, Emily sipped the black coffee that Mercer made for her. It was the most delightful place she had ever seen. She contrasted Mercer's workshop, big, airy, light, decorated with quantities of interesting objects —pictures, tapestries, strange lamps, bits of ar-

chitectural ornament, filched from some monument of Europe or the East—she compared it all with her own cramped hall bedroom, ragged as to matting, dingy as to wall-paper, and with a cracked water-pitcher. Emily tried not to be envious.

Bit by bit she told Mercer her story. He had heard its like many times before. Her experience was nothing beyond that which greets scores of young people who emerge from the country's art-schools, each season that a new class of "graduates" is turned adrift.

"You lack acquaintances," Mercer told her. "The art editors all play their favorites," he explained. "It's the hardest sort of thing to break in, if you haven't some pull. But you'll gradually get there. It's slow going, though. And meanwhile one has to exist, of course.

"Now, I know of something you might do, to earn a bit of money and yet leave you some time for your drawing. And you're more than likely to make valuable friends, too, through the means I have in mind. Every new person you

meet may introduce you to a dozen others, eventually, you know."

He stood facing her, smoking. His back was toward the great fireplace, the massive mantel of which rose half way to the lofty ceiling of the studio. From the highest ledge of the mantel there peered down a grotesque gargoyle, in the shape of a grinning devil, whose open mouth had once spouted water from the eaves of some Gothic cathedral.

The grinning devil looked down upon the two of them—Mercer, blasé, disillusioned, a successful opportunist; and the quaint, pretty, unsophisticated girl, inexperienced in the intricate scheming that makes for accomplishment in New York. Mercer had paused, and was regarding her with a calculating eye. Here was youth unsullied by the city. He weighed her story.

In another month—perhaps only in another week—it might have been too late. Mercer had seen many faces such as hers undergo the transformation that comes to those who pay the

penalty which the city demands of challenging youth.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "You pose for me and I'll give you all the work I can. It's a meal-ticket, at least—fifty cents an hour is the usual price. I'll speak to other illustrators about you, too. And in that way you'll gradually come to know the ropes. You'll pick up a lot of information about the illustrating game and you'll meet people. That's the important thing to do—get acquainted with the right bunch. Just be a good fellow and you'll get on all right. . . . What do you say?"

What *could* she say? Emily made a rapid mental calculation. Twenty hours' work a week would pay Mrs. Meehan for her hall-room and three unappetizing meals a day. Though she shrank from becoming an artist's model, she persuaded herself that the calling would be—after all—only temporary. It would be only a stop-gap, until such time as she found herself able to earn her living by her drawing. And posing for Mercer and his friends did not appall

her at all. She was sure that they must be thoroughly "nice." Had not Mercer spent a summer at East Oldport?

Emily found herself thanking Mercer for his kindness. And before she knew it almost she had made an appointment with him for the following morning.

Mr. Todd, of Tillotson & Todd, was telephoning.

"Oh, that you, Mercer? Well—what do you think of Thorpe's latest? . . . You say you're going to begin to-morrow? . . . A pippin? . . . That's good! . . . Well—hurry up with the first two drawings, old man! And when you come to the rest of 'em, don't let your religious scruples stand in the way of putting some ginger into them. I guess by the time your pippin has posed for you a few days she'll be in trim for the other sort of illustration . . . ripe, so to speak . . . eh, what?"

And Mr. Todd, of Tillotson & Todd, the famous publishers, laughed into the transmitter.

He laughed again, as he hung up the receiver. And Mr. Todd's golden-haired stenographer, who sat expectantly at the sliding-shelf of his desk, and listened and looked on as her employer telephoned, laughed with him.

CHAPTER III

SKIRMISHING

For Emily the ensuing days passed pleasantly. She was entranced by the atmosphere of Mercer's studio. It was what she had dreamed of for years—only she had pictured a studio of her own—not some one else's. But now that she realized that the road to fame and wealth was a long one, this place of Mercer's was still a source of great delight to her.

Van Mercer worked feverishly at his drawings. Often he would rush heedlessly on, far past the time when his model should have rested. And then, when the realization at length came to him that Emily was tired, he would stop in sudden contrition. Those were the periods that Emily liked best—the rests. For then Mercer talked to her. And gradually the new world—

of the city—unfolded itself more and more to her gaze.

Now and then some caller was admitted to Mercer's workshop. But it was only the favored few who succeeded in passing the watchful and zealous Saunders during a sitting.

Among those who visited the studio there was one, in particular, whose coming gave Emily a real thrill. It was Mr. Taylor Thorpe himself who sent her into a delicious flutter of excitement, for it was the first time Emily had met a real, live author face to face.

Thorpe had learned from his publishers that Mercer was at work upon the illustrations of his new novel; and having a certain languid interest in the matter—because he knew (though he would not have admitted it) that sometimes the picture on the wrapper of a book may add, or detract, from its sales and so affect an author's royalty checks, he dropped in one morning to take a precautionary look at what Mercer was doing.

Mercer swore under his breath when his caller

was announced. He was irritable that morning; and anyhow, to have an author come peering around and criticizing his drawings always annoyed him. But he greeted Thorpe pleasantly enough; and setting out some cigarettes for him, he went on with his work, after introducing his guest to Emily.

Thorpe nodded to Emily, and settled back in his chair with the air of a man who had found a comfortable seat and did not intend leaving it in a hurry. He called Emily "dearie," complimented Mercer upon his choice of a model, and set up a running fire of suggestions with regard to the illustrations of "Children of Chance."

Emily, unable to quit her pose, felt herself grow red beneath Thorpe's frankly appraising eyes. But he was a celebrity; and she supposed that celebrities might justly assume to themselves prerogatives which one might resent when asserted by lesser lights. As Thorpe's call lengthened his interest in Emily increased visibly.

"By Jove! you're going to turn out some good drawings this time, Mercer," he remarked impudently. "You ought to use Miss Fraser oftener. I've always claimed that the model is more than half that makes an illustration. Now, there's a freshness about these sketches that you don't always get—if you'll pardon my saying so."

Mercer considered Thorpe's observations to be highly offensive.

"You can say anything you want, Thorpe," he answered, as he bent over his canvas, with his back to his tormentor. "I never let any remarks of you 'lit'ry' chaps bother me in the least. Go ahead! Amuse yourself, by all means."

Thorpe laughed.

"Peppery as ever, I see! . . . You know, Miss Fraser, I've often thought I'd write a novel around Mercer—call it 'Only an Illustrator,' or something like that." Mercer groaned aloud. And Thorpe, well pleased with himself, continued. "I'd bring my artist hero to a

sense of realization of what he owes the people who pose for him . . . I don't mean the *money* he owes 'em, of course. There are some things that are too personal, you know, to touch on in a novel." Mr. Taylor Thorpe was enjoying himself. He quite fancied himself, hectoring Mercer in the presence of the pretty model.

"Are you going to put yourself into that novel?" Mercer inquired.

"Good idea—that!" said Thorpe. "I'll do it!"

"I'd like to illustrate the book," Mercer told him grimly, with a grin. "I wouldn't do a thing to your vanity, Thorpe, my boy!"

"Vanity—pooh! I've no false ideas about myself," Taylor Thorpe rejoined, with a glance which traveled down his carefully creased English trousers and rested for a moment upon his flat, carefully polished English shoes. The fellow was inordinately vain of his appearance—the most casual observer could see that. "I'll write that novel, Mercer; and you shall illustrate it. Only—I stipulate one thing. Miss

Fraser must pose for the heroine, and you'll have to put me in the pictures with her. . . . By gad! I'll make Miss Fraser herself the heroine of the book!"

Mercer scowled over his work. He reflected that Taylor Thorpe was a very objectionable person. He resented Thorpe's interest in Emily. And his own attitude toward her—hitherto quite professional and impersonal—straightway changed. He told himself indignantly that Thorpe had no business to come poaching on his preserves.

As for Emily—the fencing of the two men electrified her. Mercer she had regarded in the light of a brother artist, whose relations with her were based solely upon the bond of a common interest—for Emily still thought of herself as an illustrator, rather than as a mere model. But now it occurred to her suddenly that Mercer looked at her jealously. And she was sure that he would have liked to pitch the writer bodily out of his studio.

Meanwhile Taylor lingered. He helped

himself liberally to Mercer's Egyptians, which he fitted one after another into a long-stemmed cigarette-holder. And as he babbled on the morning wore away.

"Come out and lunch with me—you two conspirators," said Thorpe at last, after a glance at his watch.

Mercer promptly pleaded a previous engagement, whereat Thorpe's spirits seemed not at all dashed.

"You'll come?" questioned the novelist of Emily.

She glanced quickly at Mercer. But her patron was bending over his paint cabinet. She hesitated. Ought she to go? She could, at least, think of no excuse.

Taylor Thorpe allowed her no more time to deliberate.

"You've no engagement, I know," he said confidently.

And she admitted that she had none.

"Good!" said Thorpe. "That's settled, then." And he shot a look of amusement at

Mercer, who was obviously annoyed at the turn affairs had taken.

When the hangings that concealed the entrance to the studio closed behind Emily and her escort, Van Mercer permitted himself a few expertly chosen fragments of profanity. Then he told Saunders to have luncheon sent up from the restaurant in the building. As Thorpe had suspected, his excuse had been fictitious.

He ate gloomily, picturing Emily seated opposite the smug Thorpe, while that notorious squire of dames ogled her and made as open love to her as was permitted by the traditions of whatever restaurant he might have taken her to.

Taylor Thorpe was in the best of humor as he walked eastward with Emily. For a moment he was prompted, in the mild intoxication of his little victory, to take her to no less a place than the famous Sperry's. She was certainly no person over whom to have any misgivings. In fact, Thorpe considered that she

was entirely presentable—that she would "do" most decidedly.

But he reflected that there might be friends of his in Sperry's. And he had never seen Miss Fraser eat. Taylor Thorpe remembered that he had, in the past, suffered occasional embarrassment by escorting some well-appearing young woman into a fashionable restaurant, with the unfortunate result that her somewhat bizarre manner of eating had caused him no end of distress—not that he minded so much on his own account; but it was undeniably unpleasant to realize that some acquaintance at a neighboring table was regarding the object of his attentions (and himself as well) with interest (not to say amusement) as she gesticulated with a forkful of salad or drank a cocktail with exaggerated daintiness. So small a thing as a little finger, however carefully manicured, has a way of attracting a prodigious amount of attention when punctiliously outstretched while its fellows encircle the stem of a glass.

As Thorpe recalled those facts he thought better of his impulse to pilot his new friend through Sperry's exclusive portals. Instead, he took her to a little restaurant on Sixth Avenue, where the ceiling was gay with artificial flowers strung upon lattice-work, and the walls gorgeous with gaudy landscapes, depicting the greenest of mountains and the bluest of lakes.

"A quiet little place, at this time o' day," he assured Emily, "where we can talk undisturbed." Emily thought it wonderful.

"Mercer's not a half-bad chap," Thorpe remarked, when he had given their order to the waiter. "But all artists take themselves too seriously. It's amusing—the airs they give themselves. Now, this time he's making some really creditable drawings—I told him so, you know, and he didn't like it. It's you, my dear, we have to thank for those interesting and charming illustrations. If there was any real justice in this world Todd would be giving you a commission to furnish illustrations for my

book, and you would be paying Mercer fifty cents an hour for drawing you."

Emily was aghast at what seemed to her a most distorted view of an artist's functions.

"Don't you agree with me?" Thorpe asked her.

She shook her head.

"I am an artist myself, Mr. Thorpe," she explained. "I'm afraid you aren't in sympathy with us."

Thorpe placed his hand upon hers.

"My dear little lady!" he exclaimed. "You don't know how sympathetic I can be. Just give me a chance and I'll prove it to you."

She withdrew her fingers from his ardent pressure.

"I'm sure Mr. Mercer's a good artist," she declared.

Taylor Thorpe laughed.

"A successful one, why not say?" he retorted. "He's able to make the public accept his work at his own valuation. That's what constitutes success for some people, dearie. . . .

Now, with us writing men, it's different. If I wrote what I know to be good, I'd starve. I learned that long ago. But I have to live—have to get the bare necessities of life somehow. Have to buy a new car every year, for instance! Have to pay for my box at the opera, and my dues at my clubs, and all that sort of thing, you know. If Todd caught me on the Avenue in a last season's car he'd immediately try to knock five per cent. off my royalties. It'd never do, you see, to let him think I was spending less than twice my income."

Emily was dazzled by Mr. Thorpe's magnificence. She thought of the beggarly fifty cents an hour that Mercer paid her and she almost blushed. And to hide her confusion she laughed at Thorpe's sally while she told herself that she really must earn more, somehow.

"Posing for anybody else?" Thorpe inquired, in the next breath, almost as if he read her thoughts. "That's good," he said, as she shook her head.

"Mr. Mercer's going to get me more work,

though," she explained. "He's going to tell his friends about me."

"Don't!" said Thorpe impressively. "That's my advice. And don't continue to pose for Mercer, either. A model—well, a model, you know, doesn't have the easiest time in the world. The environment isn't all that it might be. And a young girl can't be too particular about her acquaintances. Now, confidentially, I should hardly think you'd care to have much to do with Mercer. . . . But of course, I suppose you don't know——" He stopped short. And he looked at Emily ambiguously.

"Mr. Mercer's an old friend," she said hastily.

"Oh! that's it, is it? Well, I'm surprised he'd start a nice girl like you to posing. Frankly, I don't like it at all of him." Thorpe wondered whether he had not, possibly, been mistaken in assuming that Emily was the little frightened fawn that he had taken her to be. So she was an old friend of Van Mercer's! That was a filly of another color.

Emily thought that Mr. Thorpe was, at least, very kind to take such an interest in her, and try to help her. And she told him as much.

"Bless you—it's nothing," he said virtuously. "I just hate to see a good little kid like you come to New York and get started wrong. That's all."

And just to start her right, he insisted on Emily's drinking a little champagne. "To celebrate our first meeting!" he said. "May there be many more of them!"

She sipped at her glass of bubbling, liquid amber; and she found it not at all unpleasant—it was the first she had ever tasted.

"Where now, sweet maid?" Thorpe asked, as they found themselves outside the restaurant once more.

"Oh! I must go back to the studio," Emily said. "Mr. Todd's in a hurry for the drawings, you know."

"Well, since it's in such a good cause I mustn't persuade you to play truant," Thorpe observed. "But some other day—yes?"

She smiled; and shook hands with him from the taxicab he had hailed for her.

"It's been very pleasant," she said. "Thank you so much!"

"And your address——" he added questioningly. "It's a big town, you know. And Mercer's none too fond of me—for all he fattens off my novels. But that's always the way with beneficiaries. They would bite the hand that feeds them. I really can't look you up at Mercer's place. And it might be worth your while to keep in touch with me. I'm an influential person with the publishers."

She gave him the address of her shabby boarding-house.

As the taxi whirled her back toward Mercer's studio Emily could not help remembering what the artist had told her. Mercer had promised that she should gain acquaintances by posing for him—acquaintances who would be of assistance to her. She felt that she was already making progress.

CHAPTER IV

HASBROOK RECONNOITERS

When Emily returned to Mercer's studio, after her luncheon with Taylor Thorpe, a radical alteration had been wrought in the relations between artist and model. Mercer's attitude toward her had changed completely. Thorpe's undisguised overtures to the girl had served to precipitate Mercer's own interest, which had hitherto been in a state of suspense, so to speak. In his professional joy at finding a model so suited to his purpose—his immediate requirements in satisfying Todd—Mercer had quite overlooked Emily's compelling femininity. Subconsciously, no doubt, he had recognized her charm. But he had been too wrapt in his work to acknowledge the fact to himself. It needed only the spur of jealousy supplied by Taylor

Thorpe to stir Mercer to a sense of proprietorship in his find.

There was very little opportunity then for Mercer to talk with Emily. He did not need much time, however, to show her conclusively that he resented the writer's attentions to her.

"Well! Did you have a pleasant party?" Mercer inquired, as she entered the studio. Though he assumed an air of unconcern, it was not so successful but that Emily perceived the venom which underlay his words.

"Oh, yes!" she exclaimed, as she removed her hat and gloves. Then, from behind the screened corner where she proceeded to resume her model's costume once more, "Mr. Thorpe's awfully interesting—isn't he?" she ventured wickedly.

"Humph! Depends on what one finds interesting," Mercer said, making a face which Emily, of course, could not see. "If conceit appeals to you—why, I should imagine you might be able to spend an infinite amount of time with Thorpe and he wouldn't pall upon you

at all." Mercer mixed his colors savagely. One might almost have supposed that he imagined he was smearing the paints into his rival's face.

Laughter came from behind the screen. And Emily, true to her sex, led her admirer on to a further expression of his opinion of Mr. Taylor Thorpe.

"You don't like him, it appears," she said.

Mercer frowned darkly.

"That's putting it mildly," he said. "He's the grandest little piece of cheese that ever happened. He's insufferable, I think. . . . But women are different," he mused. "Thorpe's quite a lady-killer. They seem to like to hear him talk about himself."

"He didn't talk about himself—much," Emily protested. It occurred to her that it would be disloyal to her agreeable new friend not to register a word or two of protest in his defense.

Mercer grunted.

"I'm surprised. What did he talk about,

then—*you?*" he asked quickly. And there was a note of suspicion in his voice that he could not quite conceal.

"A little!" Emily said. She could not resist peeping around the screen. "He talked about me a little bit. He tried to tell me some things —things that might help me along, you know."

"Help you along, eh?" There was abundant scorn in Mercer's voice. "Depends on where you want to go—whether Thorpe's words of wisdom would prove of any assistance to a girl. My warning to you is—let Thorpe's advice alone. Let it pass in one ear, if you must—and out the other."

Emily was possessed of just enough deviltry to be greatly pleased by the undisguised look of displeasure which she discerned upon Mercer's face.

"Well—we must get to work again," he said as she stepped out of the improvised dressing-room. "Thanks to our late caller the morning was pretty well wasted. I hope to the Lord no one else comes in to-day!"

It seemed as if the words were scarcely out of his mouth when Saunders, after a discreet pause, following a preliminary knock, opened the door and made an announcement which caused Mercer to throw up his hands in despair.

"Mr. Alan Hasbrook to see you!"

"The devil!" Mercer growled. "What's he want, I wonder?"

The incomparable Saunders shrugged his shoulders.

"He said he was in town only for the day and that it was a matter of importance."

Van Mercer cast aside his palette and brushes.

"Oh, well! Show him in," he said with resignation. "The day's done for. . . . You might hang around, though," he said to Emily. "I may be able to finish this bit of drapery, if he doesn't stay too long."

So Emily sat down in a chair by a window and looked out over the Park. In a moment more a tall, dark, serious-faced man well along in the thirties entered the studio. He hesi-

tated a moment; then advanced toward the artist with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Mercer? Glad to know you! I'm Alan Hasbrook. Mr. Hildreth, of Hildreth & Company, my publishers, you know, asked me to come in and have a little chat with you—about a new book of mine he's going to bring out. He thought that possibly we might be able to coöperate with you—on the illustrations, you know."

Mercer shook hands with his caller and waved him to a chair.

"I see," he said.

"It's just preliminary—merely tentative, you understand," the newcomer hastened to add. "It's only fair to you to make that quite clear. The fact is, I'm peculiar, I suppose. But you see, I feel that when an illustrator undertakes to make drawings for a novel of mine he must be in sympathy with me. I want him to sense my purpose. Otherwise I never quite feel that he catches the spirit of my work. You understand? I want his drawings really to illustrate

my work, in the literal sense—not merely to serve as decorations." He paused, to see whether the other caught his meaning.

As his caller talked, Mercer was appraising the man narrowly. Hasbrook appeared to be gripped by a tremendous earnestness of purpose. Mercer wondered if his work really did mean as much to him as he would have one believe. The artist's feelings wavered between a pity and an admiration for his caller. How different he was from Taylor Thorpe, who was also a novelist! And yet, how futile—Mercer thought—to let oneself be seized by such seriousness, if it were genuine! He listened to Hasbrook's statement of his requirements as to an illustrator; but before he could do more than merely nod the studio was thrown into a sudden uproar as a flashily dressed couple pushed through the curtained doorway. The loud shepherd's plaid of the man's suit screamed a fitting accompaniment to the startling arrangement of black and white which his companion wore.

"Howdy, Van!" the man cried—he was a slender, yet well-knit chap, who would have been athletic had he not succumbed to the deterrent of too much alcohol. "Your able assistant tried to keep us out. But 'twas only a waste of time for him, as you see."

"And now it's a waste of mine," said Mercer with a rueful grin. He shook hands with the newcomer, a fellow artist named Arthur Langdon. "Howdy do, Miss Maisie!" Mercer added, nodding to Langdon's companion, a striking blonde, who was no less a personage than Maisie Vincent, the well-known model. As host, Mercer managed introductions between such of his visitors as did not already know one another. He smiled slightly, as he looked upon the ill-assorted gathering. But he felt decidedly glum as he reflected that his day's work was as good as done for.

"Cheer up, Van! You don't want to work, anyhow, I know," Langdon said with the utmost assurance, as he helped himself to a cigarette from the box on the table. "We've come to

sacrifice an hour of our valuable time on you—haven't we, Maisie?"

"We sure have," said Maisie. "Too hot to work, isn't it, Mr. Hasbrook?" she appealed, with an air of easy familiarity.

Alan Hasbrook, though far from an adaptable type of man, nevertheless endeavored to set Miss Vincent at her ease. She was—decidedly—a lady of a sort quite different from that with which he was in the habit of associating. But he tried to hide that fact, though he was none too successful.

"Why—New York in summer never did precisely set me afire with a desire to work, Miss Vincent," he replied. "That's why I live up in Connecticut. Up there I work every day, summer and winter—seven in the morning to one o'clock, solid."

"Oh! you're just kidding," Miss Maisie exclaimed.

"No—really!" Hasbrook said.

Her eyes opened wide with astonishment at the mere idea of anybody's beginning work at

seven in the morning. "What's your line?" she inquired.

Langdon laughed loudly at the girl's naïve question.

"Gee, Maisie! Don't yon know who Mr. Hasbrook is? He's one of the boys that keep all us poor artists and models alive. He's a writer. Nay—he's *the* writer, my dear!"

Miss Vincent was in no wise disconcerted by the news. She was, in truth, a person of extraordinary poise. Things seldom upset her. She was ready for any emergency that arose. Maisie had had her own way to make in the world; and she had succeeded to a degree that was quite satisfactory to her. Self confidence was a quality which had done much for her in her struggle against the city's odds. She was no person to be set a-flutter by a mere author; and now she beamed upon Hasbrook with the utmost good fellowship and cried—

"Well met, benefactor!"

"I say, Art!" Mercer interposed. "Don't be too hard on Mr. Hasbrook. Don't put the

responsibility on him for keeping *you* alive. That's a little too much, you know."

"Speak for yourself, Van," Langdon said. "I know which side my bread's buttered on—if *you* don't. Do you realize that I never go to bed a night without uttering a fervent prayer for the preservation of all authors?"

Despite his assertion, Mr. Langdon's manner, as well as his general style of dress, was not of the sort one usually associates with praying people. And Mercer grinned openly at his pious statement.

"That's not saying much," he retorted. "I don't believe you go to bed more than one night a month, at the most. Morning's your time for turning in. That cuts your praying down to the vanishing point, my boy."

Art Langdon assumed an air of injured innocence.

"Tut, tut! That's not so at all! I leave it to Maisie, here—" and he turned with mock seriousness to his companion. "Maisie—don't I go to——"

"Be still, naughty boy!" Miss Vincent said, slapping him playfully. . . . "Isn't he awful?" she asked Hasbrook proudly.

"Why not give the publishers credit for keeping us all alive?" Alan Hasbrook asked them. He did not answer Miss Vincent's question. Langdon's remark he considered to be in execrable taste. He did not understand how Mercer could associate with such a character.

"The publishers!" Langdon and Mercer exclaimed with derision. "Why, damn 'em! They're bloodsuckers, man!" Langdon continued. "Just plain leeches who would drain the heart's blood out of us all, if they could. Little do they care for us poor devils! And where'd they be without us, I'd like to know?"

"Carrying hods, most likely," Mercer observed. It was clear that the two artists had no very exalted opinion of the publishing fraternity.

"I say, Van!" Langdon cried with sudden inspiration. "We ought to drink to their damnation, don't you think?"

"Well—we ought to drink, I dare say. I'll admit that much, Art." Mercer pressed a button which soon summoned a boy from the restaurant on the ground floor of the building. "I know your poison, Art," their host said, as the boy waited for the order. "What'll you have, Maisie?"

"Oh! Art and I always agree—don't we, Art? . . . I'll have the same," she said.

Mercer looked inquiringly at Hasbrook.

"Oh, not a thing, thank you!" the writer hastened to say.

But Mercer was not accustomed to that sort of answer to that sort of question.

"Better take a nip of something, Mr. Hasbrook. You'll need a little Dutch courage, or you'll never be able to stand *his* prattling," he objected, with a nod toward Langdon. . . . "No? . . . Nothing at all? . . . Well, I'll order some Vichy for you, at least. . . . How about you, Miss Fraser?"

Poor Emily had been dreading the question. She had been brought up, it will be remembered,

in East Oldport, where drinking was considered one of the deadly sins. Already she had fallen from grace once that day, under Thorpe's tutelage. And she had had sufficient misgivings over her lapse to make her doubly reluctant now to taste some new abomination, however pleasant it might be to the palate.

"Oh—I don't believe I'll take anything to drink, Mr. Mercer," she stammered, reddening as she felt the eyes of all upon her.

"Nonsense!" Mercer protested easily. "Of course you'll join us."

"Of course, dear!" Maisie added. "You must. I shall feel so uncomfortable if you don't!"

"I'll order for you," Mercer told Emily. And she had not the courage to object further. She was sufficiently ill at ease, as it was.

"What are you working on, Van?" Langdon inquired, as he peered at the canvas upon Mercer's easel, after the boy had vanished to regions below to execute Mercer's commands.

"Thing of Thorpe's," Mercer explained.

"Do you mind if I take a look?" Hasbrook asked.

"Not in the least!" Mercer said good naturedly. "It isn't finished, you understand. . . . Here's more of them—the lot I'm making for Thorpe's book."

"This doesn't look as if it was going into one of Taylor Thorpe's books," Langdon ventured, as he inspected the drawing critically. "This is a Sunday-school picture, Van—quite out of character for you to be doing, Van!" Langdon looked puzzled; but as he turned to another study, partly finished, he exclaimed: "Ah! that's more like it! Take care you don't get to resemble that, Miss Fraser. You will, you know, if you have much to do with Van."

Mercer shot him a warning glance. Langdon was intolerably indiscreet sometimes. It annoyed Mercer to have him so lacking in tact.

"Miss Fraser's all right," he said quickly.

"So I see," Langdon answered, with a placating wink at Maisie.

"Of course you are, dearie!" Maisie inter-

posed, fearful lest Mercer should have been offended by her pal's banter. "Art! be still!"

"I will—for a moment!" Langdon promised, taking his drink from the laden tray with which the serving boy had just returned. "Here's to the publishers—" he proposed, when they all had their glasses—"here's to the publishers! May they prosper—so long as they pay us good money!"

Alan Hasbrook was pitifully ill at ease while all this talk was going on. He had never participated in just that sort of informal gathering before. He strove manfully, however, to conceal his distaste for Langdon's inane prattle. He only hoped that he could quickly make his escape, decently, from that distasteful place. So as soon as he found an opportunity, he drew Mercer aside and said—

"I wanted to have just a short talk with you, undisturbed. Some other time, perhaps, would be better."

"We can't discuss things here very well, that's a fact," Mercer replied. "But wait a

moment! Suppose we leave this crowd for a few minutes. I'll order another round of drinks for them to keep them busy. . . . You'll excuse me if I take Mr. Hasbrook away for a moment?" he said to the others.

"Pig!" said Maisie archly. "You want Mr. Hasbrook all to yourself."

"Oh! certainly!" said Langdon. And as for Emily, she really felt that it would be just as comfortable for everybody without Hasbrook's presence. She perceived that he was not suited to the environment.

Safe in the next room, free from Langdon's questionable witticisms, Hasbrook plunged at once into the matter which had brought him to Mercer's studio.

"Mr. Hildreth is anxious to put out my new novel in a somewhat different style from that in which my previous books have appeared," he explained.

"Something more flossy?" Mercer inquired.

"Er—yes! I suppose that's what it might be termed," Hasbrook replied. "He wants to

reach a wider circle of readers. And the booksellers are always urging him to manufacture my books in a more popular fashion. 'Candy-box covers' is the term they use, I believe, to denote the gay style in which many books are launched nowadays. So Mr. Hildreth thinks it would be wise to depart from the severe dress of my other books. I must say frankly, however, that I'm far from being convinced of the wisdom of such a course. Now, you're a very clever craftsman, I know. And I realize that there's a style about your work that the public likes. But do you think that you could go at the illustrating of my type of novel with the same enthusiasm you feel in making the drawings for one of Thorpe's books, for instance?"

Mercer laughed cynically.

"My dear fellow," he said, "before answering your question I should have to ask your Mr. Hildreth what there is in it for me? If he is willing to pay me enough I could be enthusiastic as the very devil."

"I see—I see," Hasbrook observed slowly, as if it were difficult for him to understand Mercer's unashamed confession. He regarded the illustrator with a look of wonder. He was, in truth, shocked that any one with any pretense of being an artist should set his art upon so commercial a pedestal.

"Look here, Mr. Hasbrook," Mercer continued. "I never read one of your books. I never read anybody's unless I happen to illustrate 'em. Then, of course, I have to give 'em the once over, sometimes, just to get the run of the story in my mind. . . . What's this new book of yours—high-brow stuff?" he inquired easily.

"I suppose you might call it that," Hasbrook said somewhat doubtfully. "It's serious work—if that's what you mean—something I've been turning over in my mind a long time. The mark it really aims at is the condition of child labor in our factories. It's what they call an uplift novel, you know."

Mercer nodded sagely.

"Heroine a sort of 'Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model'?" he inquired.

"Well . . . not exactly," the writer replied; "but I think you understand what I mean, in general. Have you ever illustrated a novel of that sort?"

"No—never!" the artist exclaimed fervently. "But——"

"I'm afraid the thing wouldn't appeal to you," Hasbrook interrupted. He saw quite plainly that he and Mercer thought in entirely different terms. It was difficult for them to strike a common basis of understanding. It was hard even to explain to the fellow the merest detail of his purpose.

"My dear sir!" Mercer said hastily. "I'd hate to tell you what I'd do for a thousand dollars! Now, I must admit I was never right up against the proposition of tackling a high-brow story. But if Hildreth and you decide that you want your drawings turned out in my factory, why—I'll shove aside my war orders—make the Russians wait, by Jove! And I'll start all hands

working on your stuff double time. Day and night!—at my price. Don't forget to let Hildreth understand that part of the trade—at my price!"

"I'll think it over," Hasbrook told him doubtfully. He was dumfounded by Mercer's frank commercialism.

"That's all right!" Mercer assured him. "No need to make any excuses, either, if you don't engage me."

They went back into the studio then, where they found Langdon strumming ragtime on the piano, and Maisie executing a pirouette in the middle of the floor. Emily Fraser, meanwhile, listened and looked on with something akin to wonder and admiration in her eyes. She wished that she might shake off her New England reserve long enough to express in some such way the joy of living which was beginning to surge within her. Maisie was smoking. And Emily could not but acknowledge to herself the grace with which the girl manipulated her cigarette. Somehow, the proceeding did not seem

at all unconventional to Emily. But Hasbrook was plainly shocked. He rescued his hat from the floor, where Maisie's gyrations had sent it, and picking up his stick and gloves he bade them good-by.

"I may drop in again," he said to Mercer. He was looking at Emily as he spoke. It struck him that the girl was decidedly out of place in that setting. Her air was that of a modest, unsophisticated, genuine young woman. Hasbrook wondered how long she could retain her freshness and charm in the midst of such surroundings. "I may drop in on you some day, to go over this matter once more," he repeated.

CHAPTER V

OLD PALS

ART LANGDON wheeled around on the piano stool and began to play once more. And as Mercer returned from ushering his caller out, Langdon called, without deigning to turn his head, or cease his ragtime—

"I say, Van! How long you been associatin' with that?"

"A dashed long time, Art! Ever since you came in—and about ten seconds before that!" Mercer retorted.

Langdon spun about on the stool.

"Needn't be nasty to your old pals, just because you're on speaking terms with America's premier author," he countered.

Mercer shook his head.

"He's no friend of mine, Art. But if he wants

to let old Hildreth crowd a thousand iron men on me for a half-dozen of my little old drawings —why, far be it from me to say him nay. . . . I'm afraid you may have queered me, though—you and Maisie!"

Miss Vincent immediately bridled.

"Well, I like that!" she cried.

"We queer you!" Langdon exclaimed. "My dear Van—you don't appreciate us, I'm afraid. Man alive! You ought to give us a rake-off on what Hildreth pays you, if you land that commission. Maisie and I lend tone to your studio, my boy. You ought to be able to demand at least twenty per cent. more for your work, just for having us 'round when people come in. We look expensive—Maisie and I. And Maisie *is* expensive, you'd better believe!"

Miss Vincent slapped Langdon's face. And the next moment she was kissing him. He was generous. Her tailored hat and smart suit testified to that.

"You're unregenerate, Art—past all hope," Mercer said with a sigh of mock seriousness.

"You don't even recognize sterling worth and lofty purpose when you see them."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, Van," Langdon remonstrated, disentangling himself from Maisie's embrace.

"That proves my statement," Mercer retorted with a smile of amusement. "Here I have a high-brow author in my studio, looking over the shop and sizing me up. And you and Maisie come in with all your Broadway warpaint on and scare him off. You wear your Fifth Avenue clothes in here after this. And Maisie, too!" He turned to Miss Vincent. "Your earrings, my dear, are just exactly an inch too long for the conservative taste. If Miss Fraser hadn't been here to leaven the loaf our friend Hasbrook would certainly have shouted for the police."

Miss Vincent threw a cushion at Mercer, which he had some trouble to dodge.

"Since when have you turned preacher?" she demanded indignantly.

"I say, Van!" Langdon said, "you aren't

fool enough to fall for Hasbrook's religious dodge, I hope? Why, it's clear as day. He's discovered a good graft, that's all, and he's working it for all it's worth. He's a clever boy, he is. He wouldn't drink with *us*—just on account of the looks of the thing; but I'll bet he's lapping one up in some bar by this time. They're the worst sort, too—those solitary drinkers."

"It is a good graft all right, Art," Mercer agreed. "They say Hasbrook has cleaned up half a million in the last ten years—just writing his Sunday-school slush. He's cleverer than Taylor Thorpe, even. He doesn't blow his money; he keeps it. Some one told me one time that he had a country estate as big as a moving-picture magnate's."

"And what good does all his money do him, I should like to know?" Langdon exclaimed. "Say! Did you ever hear of his spending any of it for a good time—or even for charity? . . . Nix!"

Maisie Vincent smiled wisely.

"Some little girl will get hold of him some day; and she'll make him loosen up. . . . Chance for you, dearie!" she said to Emily knowingly. "He noticed you, too. Why don't you go to it?" It was not difficult for even the most casual observer to discern that Miss Vincent was a lady who was accustomed to seize opportunity at the first knock on the door.

"Oh, Miss Vincent!" Emily protested. "But don't you think he's awfully—interesting?"

"Yes—if he's got half a million, I do!" Maisie replied.

"It'd be worth it—to trail around with him," Langdon observed. "You'd be earning your money, Maisie, if you attempted it."

"Art! We're on the wrong track," Mercer said. "We ought to write stories—not illustrate 'em."

"Who ever accused you of illustratin' a story, Van?" Langdon inquired insinuatingly.

"Don't be sore, Art, because I've got 'em coming my way—because they're all flocking to my studio. I had to hang 'round the pub-

lishers' offices once, myself. And now I'm making 'em pay for the time I used to spend cooling my heels while the art editor finished his cigar. But now that I've got past that stage of the game you've no reason to have a grouch. You know you can come in here any time you like, and bring your friends. You can bring your old pipe right in here, too, and smoke it just as you always used to before I became famous. 'Twould save me something in cigarettes, too. You see, success doesn't make me any different, good people."

From Mercer's studio Alan Hasbrook went straight to his publishers' (Hildreth & Company's) offices.

"What do you think? Did you find Mercer?" Mr. Hildreth inquired, as Hasbrook sat down beside his desk.

"Yes—I found him," Hasbrook said with a rueful face. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hildreth, but really I feel that it's out of the question to put this important commission into his hands. Just

the atmosphere in which he works unfits him for my purposes." A fresh wave of revolt swept over Hasbrook as he recalled the scene he had just quitted.

"Bad as that, eh?" the publisher said. "What shocked you, Hasbrook? You look as if you'd seen unspeakable sights." Hildreth was amused by the look of horror upon the face of the writer.

Hasbrook shook his head despairingly.

"Mercer's a man of no ideals—that's quite apparent. His whole attitude toward his art is repugnant to me. I don't believe the fellow ever did an honest, sincere piece of work in his life. . . . Money! money! money! That's all he seems to think about in connection with his drawings. Apparently he doesn't care what sort of illustration he makes so long as he's well paid.

"Now, you know that such a view is absolutely at variance with all my principles. I realize that I make plenty of money by my writings. But I assure you, sir, that's the last

thing I think about. In fact, I may say that I never think about it at all." No one could have questioned the sincerity of the man—that is to say, no one except the hopelessly cynical. Hildreth himself knew Hasbrook well enough to be sure that he was no poseur, no hypocrite.

"Yes, I know," the publisher said. "But you mustn't expect everybody else is working in that same sort of way. The world's workers are—for the most part—mercenary. They think of themselves more than they think of the other fellow. Now, it seems to me that the question is—so far as we're concerned with Mercer—can he make the kind of drawings you would be satisfied with?"

Hasbrook's answer was both conclusive and emphatic.

"I'm positive he couldn't," he declared. "He never could put soul into his characters. They'd be mere mannikins—clothes horses to hang the latest styles on. His work has no depth. It's all surface; all show!"

"That's what the public likes, Hasbrook,"

the other replied. "Now, I don't think you look at this thing in a practical way——"

"No!" Hasbrook cried. "Thank God! I'm not a practical man!"

"But it strikes me that it would not only be worth while, but justifiable as well, to engage Mercer to illustrate your novel, even if he didn't catch the spirit of it. See here, Hasbrook! Dress the book up with one of his pretty, smart girls on the cover and we'd get your work into the hands of thousands of people whom we wouldn't otherwise reach. They'll read your book then, when they wouldn't give it a glance without the bait I suggest. And in that way you would get a much larger audience for the great truths you wish to drive home."

But Alan Hasbrook was still far from being convinced of the wisdom of his publisher's scheme. It did not appeal to him at all.

"The plan's repugnant to me," he answered. "You ought to have gone down to Mercer's studio with me, and then you'd have understood.

Such people as I met there! I don't think I ever passed a more uncomfortable half hour in my life. There wasn't one palatable or redeeming feature in the whole place—or hardly one," he added, as the thought of Emily came into his mind. He still wondered at her presence there. "No! I think I must insist on your giving the work to Burchard again. He is a noble, conscientious man; and he has worked in coöperation with me so long that I can feel sure of him. I can be positive that he will grasp the spirit in which my book has been conceived. His drawings will supplement my story. But Mercer's illustrations would be nothing more than caricatures of my characters."

Hildreth looked somewhat doleful as he listened to Hasbrook's plea for Burchard.

"Oh, Burchard's a good man, I grant you," Hildreth admitted. "But you know as well as I do that his work doesn't compel the attention of the public. It's too quiet. My salesmen all complain that the booksellers object to it. I tell you, Hasbrook, the public wants what it

wants. That's the whole story. And, I say, why not give it to 'em for once?"

But Hasbrook was adamant. His jaw set in a firm, straight line as he faced Hildreth.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hildreth," he said. "Perhaps you'd rather I took the book to some other publisher."

"Oh, no!" Hildreth hastened to exclaim. "Not at all! You know I want you to feel satisfied. It's only that I thought it might be advisable to make a change of artists, as an experiment, just for once. But now that I understand how strongly you object to Mercer's illustrating the book there's really nothing more to be said. We'll forget Mercer. We'll get Burchard again."

"I'm glad you agree with me," Hasbrook said, with relief in his voice. Any altercation was distasteful to him, though he never shirked his part of an argument when necessity confronted him with one. He was no weakling, as Hildreth had long ago discovered. Neither was he an astute business man, or he might never

have been willing to sacrifice sales to what Hildreth could not help considering a mere whim. But few people were able to grasp the immensity of the motives which spurred Hasbrook on in his writing. He believed that a great work lay before him; and though he often felt ill-equipped to perform the tasks that his spirit set for him, nevertheless he never faltered. He was forever pushing steadily toward the goal.

CHAPTER VI

A FEW DISCLOSURES

It was late in the afternoon, the hour when the fading light fixes the close of an artist's working day. At that time it is not an unusual thing for celebrities, both artistic and literary as well, to drop in at The Scribblers' for a few drinks and desultory conversation.

The Scribblers' is a New York institution where artists and authors, and occasional patrons of the arts (eligible as lay-members because of their generosity to the cult) may gather and revivify their flagging spirits when the day is done—a Bohemian club, in short, serving as an intellectual clearing house for its members as well as an admirable oasis for the thirsty.

On this particular evening Art Langdon breezed into The Scribblers' café. He and

Maisie had had a slight misunderstanding; and instead of taking that temperamental young woman to some fashionable place of refreshment for a cocktail or two, preliminary to dinner, as was his custom, Langdon had decided that discretion was the better part of valor and had left Maisie to recover from her pet alone. Accordingly, he turned to The Scribblers' as the place best suited to his needs, both of companionship and conviviality. Art promptly settled himself at a table where there was no question of his welcome.

"Howdy, Sawyer—how goes it?" he inquired, of that eminent art critic, Herbert Sawyer.

"Same old grind, Art!" Sawyer said.

"Grind!" exclaimed Taylor Thorpe. "By Jove, Sawyer, I wish my game was as easy as yours. All you have to do is to go and look at somebody's daubs, in some gallery, and then write a lot of drivel about them. And it's easy to hold down your job too, because all the *Evening Banner* wants is something to put its old lady subscribers to sleep; and if your stuff won't

do it the Lord knows no writer's could. The *Banner'd* have no recourse left except to furnish a bromide powder with each paper."

The art critic, Sawyer, was in no wise disturbed by Taylor Thorpe's gibes. The truth of the matter was that Sawyer knew that he was a fakir, and he knew that many other people knew it, too. It was a matter of record among the habitues of The Scribblers' that Sawyer experienced his inspiration to become an art critic in that very place. He had been, in years past, a roving newspaper writer—a free-lance, so-called—a term generally employed to denote gentlemen who lead a precarious existence by trusting to their wits for their next meal.

"Look here, Sawyer!" one of his cronies had said to him one day. "Why don't you make a specialty of art criticism?"

"Art criticism!" Sawyer exclaimed. "What do I know about art? How can I write about art?"

"That's all right," the other replied. "That's easy. Nobody knows anything about art. We

all have our own theories; but it's too intangible a subject for any one to prove that his opinions about it are correct. Your views are likely to be as good as the next man's."

The idea appealed to Sawyer. And that conversation was the beginning of his rise to his present position. He made a much easier living by panning (or approving, as it suited his convenience) his artist acquaintances, and he cared little what the initiated thought of his work. So long as he succeeded in pulling the wool over the eyes of his managing editor he was satisfied. He merely smiled at Thorpe's jest about the soporific influence of his column.

"Gad!" Langdon exclaimed. "I'll have to begin reading the *Banner* myself. Been troubled with insomnia lately."

"Don't do it, Art!" It was the well-known playwright, Frederic Watson, who was speaking. "You're not strong enough to run any such risk as that. You'd never wake up again."

"What I never can understand—" said Taylor Thorpe, loath to let the art critic go without

further hectoring—"what I can never understand is this: how do you manage to stay awake yourself when you're writing your stuff, Sawyer?"

"Go to the devil!" growled Sawyer, albeit good-naturedly. "You chaps are jealous. That's what's the matter with you."

"Well—I envy you, Sawyer, I'll admit," said Watson. "You've almost as easy a life as the theatrical managers and the publishers—grafting off what we poor devils write. Chaps like Art here slave over a canvas; and all you have to do is to come along, squint at it, and go home and pound out any sort of drool about it that pops into your head. Creative work is what breaks a fellow's heart. Just you try to write a play some time, Sawyer, and you will find out what intolerable drudgery it is."

"Or a novel, Sawyer!" Taylor Thorpe added. "A novel's infinitely more difficult to write than a play. In the first place, it's five times as long. And more than that, you have to work out everything, down to the smallest detail. Now, just

imagine how I have to rack my brains to turn out a description of the way my latest hero embraces my latest heroine! I am under the necessity of turning the trick a little differently each time, you understand."

"That ought to be easy for you, Thorpe," Watson interrupted. "You've enough personal reminiscences to draw on to furnish you with material for writing a thousand tender passages."

"Maybe!" Taylor Thorpe admitted with a grin. "But when you write one of your plays, my boy, just before the final curtain, you simply need to stick in a stage direction, like this: 'Lord Stanleigh holds out his arms to her. She comes to him. He kisses her.' The actors supply your play with all the little touches that I have to turn out by the sweat of my brow when I write a novel."

"Nonsense!" Watson scoffed.

"It's the truth!" Thorpe declared. "It's the truth, and you know it."

"Oh, Lord!" Art Langdon interrupted. "You

8555

fellows are hard at it again. I never drop in here without finding a life-sized scrap on. That's why all of us are underpaid. There's too much dissension and jealousy among us. We ought to get together—form a union—and all work against the harpies who fatten off us. Maybe we'd have to form more than one union. Let all the illustrators combine and I'll guarantee we could boost our prices forty per cent. The publishers would have to pay us our figure —or make their own drawings. And if all the novelists would start a union, and all the playwrights another, the publishers and the managers would be forced to raise royalties."

While Langdon was talking another member of The Scribblers' joined the group. Langdon was especially pleased to see the newcomer, because he furnished a particularly favorable target for his tirade. The latest arrival was no other than the worthy Todd, of Tillotson & Todd, publishers.

"I'll have you shot at sunrise, Langdon!" Todd announced, as the artist finished his ha-

rangue. "Man alive! Do you want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs? Don't you know that we're tight up against it as it is—with the movies, and motor cars, and golf and tennis and what not to take up the time that people used to spend in reading? Nobody reads books nowadays except cripples, children, and the feeble-minded."

"The feeble-minded! Ha, ha!" laughed Sawyer. "I always wondered who read Thorpe's novels."

"You've forgotten one class of reader," said Langdon, when the laughter at Thorpe's expense had died away. "There's the religious people, Todd. You mustn't leave them out. *They* read. They read Alan Hasbrook's books. And there's a lot of 'em, too."

"Where do they live, I wonder?" asked Thorpe. "I never yet met a man, woman or child who would own up to having read one of Hasbrook's novels."

"The great rural districts!" Sawyer exclaimed. "That's where they live. And the

reason why they have time to read is because there's nothing else for them to do when they're not working, eating or sleeping. Evenings, Sundays and stormy days they revel in Hasbrook's books. They make the proceeding a regular debauch. They like to read about us wicked devils in the cities and Hasbrook paints us for them in lurid colors. They stick right at one of his five hundred page stories until Virtue (country bred) triumphs over Vice, who's always from the 'metrolopus.' "

"He's a clever fellow—that Hasbrook!" Taylor Thorpe asserted, somewhat enviously. Thorpe's own sales were enormous. But Hasbrook's were even larger. And Thorpe could not help recognizing the pinch of competition.

"You bet he's clever!" Sawyer said. "He discovered that there are more farmers' wives and daughters in the country than there are servant girls in the cities. You were pretty wise, Thorpe, to play up to the cooks and ladies' maids, with your erotic love stories of the rich.

But you'll have to take your hat off to this chap Hasbrook; he's gone you one better."

The shout that greeted this sally proclaimed that Sawyer had scored heavily on his late critic, the smug Thorpe. The novelist acknowledged the truth of Sawyer's remarks by reddening slightly. But his professional interest in his rival, Hasbrook, kept him from dropping out of the fray.

"You know him, Sawyer?" he inquired.

"I've met him a couple of times," the art critic said.

"I ran across him in Mercer's studio the other day," Art Langdon informed them. "He's a dashed prig—that's what he is."

Langdon's announcement appeared to amuse the playwright. Watson laughed as if hugely pleased by something.

"Ha, ha! He must have enjoyed himself—in Mercer's studio!" he observed ironically. "Who was there?"

"Oh! just Maisie and I—and a new model Mercer's discovered lately. Van said we

scared Hasbrook away, and lost him a commission."

"Hasbrook beat it, did he?" said Sawyer with a grin. "I don't wonder. He must have felt about as comfortable as a sheep among wolves."

Art Langdon looked at Sawyer scornfully.

"Don't you worry about him!" he exclaimed. "He's a poseur—that's what Hasbrook is. Just a plain hypocrite. You can't fool me. I know."

Taylor Thorpe rose. Now that the conversation turned on hypocrites he felt that it might be just as well for him to absent himself lest he draw more fire from the sharp-tongued art critic.

"Well, boys—I must be on my way," he said. "I've got to go home and get my heroine out of trouble."

But Thorpe did not make his escape quite quickly enough, though it was not Sawyer who renewed the attack upon him, but Watson, the playwright.

"Some day, Thorpe, you'll land your heroine

in such a fix you'll never be able to get her out again—to the satisfaction of the vice commission," Watson warned him mockingly.

"I should worry!" answered Thorpe easily. "That's Todd's lookout. He keeps nagging at me to make my books spicier. I told him only a day or two ago that there was a limit to which the compositors were willing to go. But it didn't make any impression on Todd. He says he's going to publish a series of classics, just to save his face. He thinks if his house put out a line of high-brow books it would take the curse of mine off his imprint."

"There's nothing would do that, Thorpe," Art Langdon said. "It'll be a waste of money," he added impressively, with a glance at Todd, who sat shameless, enjoying Thorpe's discomfiture to the full.

"So I tell him," retorted Thorpe sourly. . . . "Well—so long!"

"Thorpe's a lucky dog," Watson remarked, after the novelist had gone on his way. "He turns out two novels a year and cleans up more

than most Wall Street men—isn't that so, Todd?"

"But Alan Hasbrook writes one book in a year or two, and I'll wager his income is twice what Thorpe's is," Sawyer interrupted.

"Think of the mush he has to write, though!" Art Langdon exclaimed. "It must be a terrible strain on the man."

"How about Thorpe?" Watson asked drily. He had, obviously, a very low opinion of that famous author's masterpieces, which Tillotson & Todd launched upon the book market with unceasing regularity.

"Oh! Thorpe's graft is easy," Langdon replied. "He doesn't have to point a moral. And Thorpe writes well—everybody admits that. But Hasbrook's public couldn't read his books if they were well written. They wouldn't understand. Hasbrook must write down to his public. And it certainly must pall upon the man frightfully to write so far down as he does."

"He's a genius—Hasbrook's a genius," Saw-

yer explained. "The chap's nothing short of a marvel."

"I wonder if the fellow really does write his 'uplift' stuff with his tongue in his cheek?" said Todd musingly. "If I could be sure he was faking I'd make him an offer to leave Hildreth and let me publish his books."

Sawyer shook his head.

"You would never get him away from Hildreth, Todd. Hildreth honestly thinks that Hasbrook is the greatest writer since John Bunyan. He believes that he and Hasbrook are combining in spreading a doctrine of righteousness broadcast over the land. And I have a suspicion that Hasbrook thinks so, too."

Mr. Todd, of the famous publishing house of Tillotson & Todd, looked glum. He hated to see good profits escape his clutches.

"It's like the fifteen-cent lodging houses," he said—"philanthropy and ten per cent. Only Hasbrook and Hildreth make a good deal more than ten per cent. out of their unselfish devotion to mankind."

Watson smiled as he noted Todd's wistfulness over the thought of money that some one else was making.

"Cheer up, Todd!" he cried. "The whole world isn't religious."

"Thank the Lord!" said Todd fervently. "We'd all starve, otherwise."

CHAPTER VII

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

"I've a bit of news for you, Hasbrook. I don't know what you'll say when you hear it. . . . The *International* wants to run 'The Pillagers' as a serial."

Alan Hasbrook regarded Hildreth with amazement. He had invited the publisher to spend a week-end with him in Connecticut, and Hildreth had just arrived at Hasbrook's house. They were sitting in the library, when Hildreth made his surprising announcement regarding the offer of the magazine for Hasbrook's forthcoming novel.

"What's come over them?" Alan Hasbrook asked incredulously.

"I suppose they want the advertising value of your name," Hildreth told him. "The *In-*

ternational has a reputation for going after the well-known authors, you know."

"But my work cannot appeal to them—or to their public," Hasbrook objected. "Even if they thought me prominent enough to feature my name on their cover, I should think that they would hesitate about printing any matter so foreign to the type of writing one expects to find in their magazine."

"No! I don't suppose for a minute that they care for your work themselves. But they wouldn't let a little thing like that interfere with their profits. And they'll take care of their public by filling up such issues as your novel would appear in with enough pathological fiction to satisfy their readers, whom they have educated to demand that sort of story."

An unmistakable look of disgust overspread Alan Hasbrook's face.

"I don't think I want to do this thing, Hildreth," he said.

Hildreth nodded understandingly. It was no more than he had expected.

"I'm not surprised at your aversion to letting them have your novel," he told Hasbrook. "But there are a number of angles from which we ought to regard their proposition—they offer twenty-five thousand dollars, by the way, for 'The Pillagers.' "

The author of the novel in question looked at the publisher indignantly.

"That's the last thing I'd take into consideration—the money!" he said hotly.

"I know—I know!" Hildreth replied hastily. "That wasn't what I was going to speak about. I just happened to mention the price incidentally. What strikes me is this: the *International* would open up an entirely new field of readers for you. I don't know but that it's a great opportunity for you. You can present what you have to say to thousands of people who really need to hear some good, plain truths, straight from the shoulder. No doubt the majority of the *International's* readers can shed such arguments as yours as a duck sheds water. But there ought to be some among them who could

be reached in the way you are trying to reach our great population."

"There's something in that," Hasbrook mused.

"Of course," the publisher continued—"under our contract I have the exclusive right to publish your writings, in any form whatsoever. But if you feel that you want to let the *International* run your story I wouldn't stand in the way."

"Would it mean a smaller sale for the book—if they serialized the novel in their magazine?" Hasbrook asked.

"That's difficult to determine," Hildreth said. "It's problematical. Magazine publication might increase the sales of the book. On the other hand, it might lessen the volume sale. One can never foretell these things."

"I should say that ten thousand dollars of the twenty-five ought to go to you, in any case, as a sort of indemnity, to protect you against possible loss of profits," Alan Hasbrook said suddenly. The suggestion was characteristic of

the man. He was no grasping opportunist, like Thorpe and his ilk, who were always ready to milk their publishers to the last penny obtainable. But on the other hand, those mercenary writers had to deal with publishers of a different sort from Hildreth. Todd, for instance, never hesitated to gouge an author out of his royalties; and it was rumored that he had a curious system of accounting for sales of books —a system which was not altogether satisfactory to his authors. "You ought to have ten thousand, at least," Hasbrook declared.

"That's more than fair," Hildreth replied. "In fact, I'm not at all sure I ought to take so much."

"But I want you to," the other insisted. "I owe a great deal to you, Hildreth. If it hadn't been for you my books might never have got into print. I should have written them, just the same. But there would no doubt be a trunkful of unpublished manuscripts in my attic today. . . . I'll never forget that you believed in the sincerity of my work and that you were

willing to risk your capital in launching it between covers."

"You mustn't forget, Hasbrook, that I've profited handsomely by becoming your publisher," Hildreth reminded him.

"You're speaking of money——"

"Yes! But it's not only that. You have brought something else into my life that's bigger than that. You have given me a chance to perform a service for humanity. I feel that it's a great privilege to be your publisher, Alan. When I drop out of harness I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have published books that were of real value to the world—not mere catch-penny shams. I shall feel that in my humble way I've helped along the great work you're engaged upon." It was true, as the art critic, Sawyer, had told Todd that evening at The Scribblers'—Hildreth believed absolutely in the sincerity of Hasbrook. He was convinced that Hasbrook was the greatest living writer among English-speaking peoples—greatest because he knew that Hasbrook was

something more than a literary mountebank, cutting capers for the diversion of the public; because he knew that Alan Hasbrook had the welfare of humanity at heart, because he probed the sores of the world, in order to discover the hidden canker that festered in the vitals of his fellow man, and caused suffering and sorrow and sin.

Hasbrook looked gratefully at this man who was at the same time his business associate and his friend.

"If my poor efforts are of any avail, the results will have been contributed to, in no small measure, by you, Hildreth," he said slowly and with much feeling.

"Well—to come back to this offer of the *International*—" said Hildreth. "You're inclined to look upon it favorably, then?"

"In the light in which you have presented it—yes!" the author said. "I never should have thought that I could endure to see myself in such company. But I am afraid that attitude on my part is only one of false pride. It is my

duty, no doubt, to subject my personal whims to the cause. The end is worth the means, I honestly believe."

"Shall I close with them, then?" Hildreth asked him.

"Yes!" Hasbrook replied steadfastly. . . . And then he burst forth passionately—"Oh! I suppose there'll be plenty of critics who will say that I'm prostituting my art for the sake of the money. But I can't help that. I know—and you know—that I am acting for what I firmly believe to be the best."

Alan Hasbrook was alone in his study. He tore open the special delivery letter that had just been brought to him, bearing the imprint of Hildreth & Company; and as Hasbrook read it an expression of annoyance and dismay came across his face. The note was written in Hildreth's characteristically intimate style.

"Dear Hasbrook:

"Bad news! We are jointly guilty of an oversight, I'm afraid. It never occurred to me

(any more than to you) that the *International* would not—as a matter of course—use Burchard's drawings to illustrate 'The Pillagers.' But to my surprise, after the contract is signed, they flatly refuse to run Burchard's illustrations.

"They have already put your MS. in Van Wyck Mercer's hands and the fat is in the fire. Though I have cudgeled my brains—such as I have—I can think of no way to prevent what I foresee you'll consider to be a great catastrophe.

"If you had not such a decided aversion to Mercer as a possible illustrator of your novel I wouldn't feel so chagrined. As a matter of fact, I quite understand the *International* crowd's position. Burchard's pictures are too quiet for them. They want something flashy. But that is beside the question. I'm sorry to have this thing happen—it's exactly what you did not want.

"Yours,

"ANTHONY HILDRETH."

Hasbrook did not reproach Hildreth for the calamity. He condemned himself, rather; for he considered Mercer's advent into the situation to be nothing more than the natural penalty for keeping bad company. Hasbrook winced as he

pictured his story spread upon the pages of the *International,* with Mercer's shoddy illustrations sprinkling it thickly.

Well! There was no use kicking against the pricks. He must accept the fact. But it was none the less annoying.

Hasbrook had gone to his study with the intention of spending the morning at his writing —according to his custom. But he knew that the day was spoiled for him—so far as any literary work was concerned. His mood was not right for detached writing. And he realized, from long experience, that he might as well not attempt to write a single line until he had become reconciled to the news that Hildreth's letter had brought him. And he needed a little time for that.

He pushed the electric button upon his desk. And to the servant who came in answer to his summons he said—

"Tell Wilson to have the car ready to take me to the station. I want to catch the nine-twenty to town."

Hildreth was not surprised when his secretary told him—later that morning—that Mr. Hasbrook would like to see him. The publisher only hoped that Hasbrook had taken his bad news philosophically.

Alan Hasbrook smiled, as he entered Hildreth's private room. And under that smile Hildreth's worried expression quickly faded. He was, in truth, vastly relieved.

"I was afraid you'd come after me with a gun," Hildreth said.

"I'm not quite so bloodthirsty as that," Hasbrook replied, as they shook hands, "though I'll admit I was pretty thoroughly upset when I read your letter. I see nothing to do, however, but to make the best of a bad business. I'm on my way to Mercer's now. Just thought I'd drop in here, on my way to his studio, and set your mind at rest."

"I'm glad you did!" said Hildreth. "I'm relieved to find that you feel as agreeable as you do over the situation." He had had no slight misgivings as to the way in which Has-

brook would receive the news that his note had conveyed.

"What can't be cured must be endured," Hasbrook answered. "But it *is* a disappointment—I'll admit. However—maybe enough good will come out of the affair more than to outweigh any injury to my feelings—I only hope this *International* venture may be worth the price it is costing me in mental anguish."

"Good for you!" Hildreth exclaimed. "I might have known you would be reasonable about this thing, Hasbrook. But it's a shame, just the same. I wish I hadn't urged you to accept the *International's* offer."

Hasbrook waved away his friend's regrets.

"Don't worry!" he begged. "I absolve you absolutely, Hildreth. . . . And now I must run along and see Mercer. Maybe he won't do badly, after all. I hope, at least, that I can prevail upon him not to introduce any of his half-naked girls into his compositions. . . . Good-by!" And Hasbrook went on his way, leaving behind him a much relieved person, for

Hildreth had been genuinely worried by the *contretemps* in which he had become involved.

Alan Hasbrook never stayed in the city longer than necessity required. There was something about the very atmosphere of the place that oppressed him. Those who make their homes in New York become too accustomed to its vices to be disturbed by the monstrous things that are so apparent to the out-of-town visitor. For the most part, the city-dweller accepts conditions as they are. Familiarity with danger eventually breeds contempt for it—the old saw being as true to-day as it ever was. And so New Yorkers rush along the pathway of their existence, too intent on their own pleasures, their own food, their own habiliment, to concern themselves either with their own souls, or those of their neighbors.

But Hasbrook, fresh from his country home, viewed the metropolis with a clearer eye. Whenever he made one of his flying visits to town he marveled that human beings should so herd together. He hated the surge of the

crowds, the dust-blown streets, the noise, the fevered rush of the city's denizens. The cosmetics upon the faces of the women, and the suggestive fashions of their exaggerated costumes, outraged his sense of decency. And the men he saw—some with drink-reddened faces, others with the pallor of drugs upon them—they revolted him. He was always glad to escape to the sanctuary of his wind-swept hills again, in God's country.

And now he hurried toward Fifty-ninth Street. He was eager to finish his errand.

Arriving shortly at Mercer's studio, Hasbrook was at once admitted into the artist's presence.

"How d'y' do, Mr. Mercer! I hear you're going to illustrate my novel for the *International,*" Hasbrook said, as Mercer rose to greet him.

"Yes!" Mercer replied with a grin. He could not repress a feeling of exultation that he had —after all—triumphed over Hasbrook's prejudices, and defeated him. "Going to begin the

drawings just as soon as I finish the set I'm making for Thorpe's new book."

"Have you read my manuscript yet?"

"Yes!" said Mercer. "And I've just the right sort of model for the heroine, too. You saw her when you were here before."

"Not Miss—er—Miss Maisie?" Hasbrook inquired, with a feeling of alarm.

Mercer quickly set his fears at rest.

"Oh, no! She's Art Langdon's private property. She never poses for me. . . . I mean the other little girl—the quiet one—Miss Fraser."

"Oh, yes!" Hasbrook was greatly relieved by the information. "I remember her quite well. She—she doesn't seem the usual type of model."

"No!" said Mercer, as he filled his pipe. "She's new at the game—quite fresh and original, she is! I flatter myself that she's a find."

Hasbrook dropped into a chair. There were certain things that he wanted to say to the artist.

"Now, Mr. Mercer, I don't know what suggestions the *International's* art editor has given you. But I hope you won't feel under the necessity of making the illustrations for my novel too—too—er—ultra modern, so to speak. I prefer something a bit quiet. Factory girls don't dress like theatrical stars, you know."

"Not unless the factory owner takes a personal interest in them," said Mercer callously.

"Thank goodness there's nothing like that in my plot!" Hasbrook protested.

"No! I noticed as much," Mercer assured him dryly. . . . "Ah! good morning!" he called, as some one appeared in the doorway behind Hasbrook's chair. "Here's the little lady herself! We were just speaking of you," he explained to Emily; for it was she who had come in.

"Good morning!" Emily Fraser replied, hesitating as she saw that her patron had a caller.

"Don't go away!" said Mercer, as she seemed about to disappear. "You remember Mr. Hasbrook?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" she exclaimed, coming forward once more.

"Mr. Mercer tells me you're going to pose for him when he illustrates my novel," said Hasbrook, rising.

Emily nodded and smiled brightly.

"Yes! And I'm much interested," she announced. "I've asked to be allowed to read the manuscript. I've already begun it," she explained, beaming on him.

Hasbrook was pleased by the girl's enthusiasm.

"You like it, then?" he said.

"Yes! It's exactly the life I know," she told him—"not like New York at all! I don't see how you can know so much about factory towns, Mr. Hasbrook."

"I spent almost two years studying factory conditions, Miss Fraser. My great regret is that I can't write more tellingly about the things I've seen. There's so much misery, so much injustice, so many abuses that the general public knows nothing about. A man wears a

pair of shoes, or a hat, with never a thought except as to how they may suit his personal taste, or his comfort. He thinks that his responsibility has ceased when he has paid his money for an article—just as if he were not morally accountable for the welfare of those individuals who produced the necessity for him. When I think of all the distress I've witnessed among factory hands—especially the young girls and mere children—it makes me feel pitifully incompetent when I attempt to set it all down in cold words."

"I know what the factory girls have to face," Emily said. "That's one reason why I'm here, in New York."

As he looked at her, Hasbrook found himself wondering whether she would find the alternative of a model's life in the city any improvement over that of a factory operative in a mill town. He was—as a matter of fact—so interested in the girl that he did not notice the cynical smile which Mercer's face had worn during the conversation between Miss Fraser and

himself. Van Mercer did not take much stock in his famous caller's pretensions.

"Well, Miss Emily—" the artist said, when Hasbrook had gone on his way, "I hope our illustrations won't cause our serious-minded friend any misgivings. I'd hate to make his heart bleed, when it has been sapped so much already. But there's the *International* to consider. They're the boys that pay the bill. I have to remember that."

"Isn't it possible to please them and him, both?" the girl asked.

"Rather a large order—that!" Mercer replied. "It's hard to serve two masters, my dear—especially when they profess such different ideals."

"What did you think of his novel?" Emily inquired.

"Drivel!" sneered Mercer. "Sheer piffle! I didn't waste much time on it, you bet! I don't see how he can write the stuff. I almost think he must be in earnest, or he never could turn out such unmitigated rot."

There was silence for a few moments. And then Emily said slowly—

"It's true—what he writes."

"Maybe!" Mercer admitted. "But who cares? And what does he care? What does he care for the poor working girl—except that she furnish him material for a few cheap heart-throbs? . . . No! The fellow's a hypocrite. Perhaps he fools himself, sometimes. He may spout his assumed morality so often that he gradually comes to believe in it. But he can't fool me. And I wish he'd keep out of my studio," Mercer declared savagely. "I don't want him hanging around here, with his sanctimonious, holier-than-thou airs. I wasn't good enough to illustrate his trashy book. And now that I've got this commission from the *International*—in spite of him—he needn't expect any favors from this quarter."

CHAPTER VIII

LAUNCELOT OR GALAHAD?

Emily was in a state of most agreeable excitement. Mercer had invited her to go to the Costume Ball with him. To all the artist fraternity the Costume Ball was the great event of the season; and on the red-letter night Art Langdon and Maisie Vincent, together with Mercer and Emily, were to make up a dinner-party, for which a private room had already been engaged at Randolph's restaurant. From Randolph's the four of them—already in costume—would proceed in a taxi to Meister's Hall, where the revels of the Costume Ball were yearly enacted.

To Mercer Emily was indebted for her costume—a Turkish affair, the abbreviated veil of which would serve admirably for a mask. She had already tried on the garments, down to

the tasseled slippers, at least five times. And on each occasion she had been more entranced than before. She could hardly wait for the night of the ball to come.

But it did arrive, at last. And as Emily's sparkling eyes regarded her companions across the dinner-table at Randolph's, she felt that it was the most delightful experience of her life.

Mercer was arrayed as a Corsican pirate. He made a romantic figure, with his earrings, and a red silk kerchief bound around his head. Maisie Vincent was a bewitching Spanish dancer, with her partner, Langdon, in the character of a bull-fighter.

A preliminary cocktail did not in the least lessen Emily's appreciation of the gay scene. Mercer would not let her drink the second one which Langdon promptly ordered. Van knew that she was not accustomed to drinking; he knew, moreover, that there was a long night before them.

But it was different with Maisie. She drank as much as either Art or Mercer did and for a

time seemed no whit the worse for it. Emily could not help marveling at her capacity; she even admired her, somewhat, for her ability to keep the upper hand of the wine she consumed.

Emily sipped her own champagne cautiously. Mercer's warning had made her careful.

Three months before, Emily would have been scandalized by that dinner. But she had come, by easy stages, to regard the things her friends did as being quite above criticism. As for Mercer, she felt instinctively that the king could do no wrong. And since the others did no more than he, her natural conclusion was that everything was as it should be.

Emily's temperance did not escape Miss Vincent's roving eye.

"You *are* a little prude, my dear!" Maisie said to her reproachfully, as if there were a certain stigma about the word. "You've hardly drank anything at all!"

"Emily's all right," Mercer interposed. "She's a sensible little lady."

"But think of the fun she misses!" Maisie exclaimed.

"Oh! I'm having a good time," Emily protested.

"Emily's saving up for what comes later," Langdon explained with a grin. "You'd better go a bit slow, Maisie. I don't want to take you home before you ever get to the ball."

Miss Vincent tossed her head indignantly.

"You look out for yourself!" she retorted. "If I have to help you into a cab it won't be the first time."

"Don't begin quarreling, now—you two!" Mercer said reproachfully. "There's really no room for an argument, anyhow, for I'll probably be the one to pack you both off together, before the ball's half over."

"Stuff!" Maisie sniffed. "You talk like a fish, Van! Anybody'd think *you* never got tight yourself. . . . I can take care of myself anywhere and any time, without the help of any man alive." In her indignation Maisie knocked over her wineglass.

"There you go!" Mercer cried. "You've had too much already!"

"You joggled my elbow, Art! You know you did!" Maisie said angrily. "I'm as sober as I can be."

"Yes—considering all the wine you've had," Mercer told her dryly.

"There, there!" Langdon said hastily, anxious to avoid a scene. He knew from long experience that girls in Maisie's condition often passed rapidly into a state of hysteria. " 'S'all right! No harm done! We're all all right!" he affirmed, with the assurance of one who was himself well started on the road to intoxication.

"Sure!" said Mercer. "Let's hurry up and finish. We'll all feel better for a little fresh air. It's hot in here." He looked at his watch. "It's about time we were starting over to the hall, anyhow."

When they reached Meister's—a feat accomplished without further mishap—the Costume Ball was in full swing. As Emily entered the

ballroom she was entranced by the colorful spectacle. Dainty wood-sprites in the filmiest of drapery went slipping and swaying past her in the arms of painted Indians, and clowns, and cowboys. There were sailors and tramps, cannibals and priests, Mexicans and Tyrolese and Chinamen. And as the newly arrived party stood for a few minutes just inside the doorway they saw such celebrities as Napoleon, Dante, Queen Elizabeth, Bluebeard, and Don Quixote go prancing past—all of them one-stepping enthusiastically, and with utter disregard of committing any anachronism. Maisie and Art Langdon were not long able to resist the alluring syncopated strains of the band that was playing upon a dais at the further end of the room. And they had no sooner joined the dancers than Mercer drew Emily into the ever-shifting throng and they, too, glided sinuously away to the sensuous sounding music.

Emily's lips parted in a smile of sheer delight as she abandoned herself to the rhythm of the dance and allowed herself to be sucked into the

swirling eddies. Held tightly in Mercer's arms, Emily danced with an enjoyment she had never known before. Her surrender to the infection of that hectic throng was complete.

It was with supreme satisfaction that Mercer felt her clinging to him.

"Are you happy?" he whispered.

"Do you need to ask me that?" she answered. And her eyes, so near his own, fairly radiated joy.

That dance was finished all too soon. And Emily and her partner found themselves the center of a half-dozen merrymakers who had recognized Mercer beneath his piratical make-up and came hurrying up for the sake of good-natured banter.

Then the band struck up another air. And before Emily knew it she had been claimed by Bluebeard himself, who asserted loudly that Mercer had abducted her from his own harem.

They had not half-circled the hall before Bluebeard began making violent love to her. Perhaps it was the wine she had drunk at Ran-

dolph's; perhaps it was only the intoxication of the music, and the lights, and the gay costumes: at all events, Emily thrilled deliciously under Bluebeard's ardor. And she almost forgot Mercer's more tender advances. But not for long. For her patron soon rescued her from her captor, bringing a policeman and a South Sea Islander to help him.

"Where are Maisie and Mr. Langdon going?" Emily asked, as she saw their late dinner companions wending their way toward a door.

"The café's out there," Mercer told her. "I'm afraid Art's started in to drink the bar dry."

It was perfectly evident, as the night wore on, that there were others besides Langdon who cherished the same ambition. Now and then a couple would go spinning around the ballroom for all the world like a pair of whirling dervishes. And there was loud talk occasionally, when some reveler resented the too marked attentions of another masquerader to his dance partner.

"You musn't mind," Mercer told Emily. "It's only once a year that the lid's off like this. There's always a little rough stuff pulled at these dances. It's just part of the picture, you know."

When the first disturbance occurred Emily was conscious of a distrust that perhaps the Costume Ball was not quite all that a polite and well-regulated affair should be. Indeed, it struck her that the conduct of many of the masqueraders was a bit too free-and-easy for the best circles. But she decided, in the end, that she was too severe a judge. Who was she—she reflected—to criticize the country's most talented artists and authors? Mercer had pointed out many celebrities to her—now a famous newspaper cartoonist, now a magazine muckraker, and again an actress of renown. There was no end to the list of well-known names that Mercer reeled off to her, from Frederick Wirdman, the decadent poet, to Clara Sanderson, whose latest semi-religious novel had aroused endless discussion. Emily did not know that

there was also certain gossip concerning Wirdman and the same lady which had nothing to do either with religion or poetry.

It was all so tremendously interesting to Emily Fraser that she felt a pang of regret when the dancers began to thin out. She was sorry that her first Costume Ball was soon to become merely a thing of memories.

"I hate to go home," she told Mercer, when at last he suggested leaving.

"The fun's about over," he said.

"Where are Maisie and Mr. Langdon?" she asked.

"Oh! They left hours ago." Mercer grinned. "I put them in a taxi and told the chauffeur where to take them," he explained.

Somehow, Emily was not so shocked as she would have been, once. It even struck her as curious that she was able to accept such news of friends of hers with equanimity.

"Well—if we must go I suppose there's nothing else to do," she said. And again, in the taxicab that whirled them away from Meister's

Hall she said—"I've had the best time in all my life. I hate to go home."

It seemed to her the most natural thing in the world when Mercer put his arm around her and drew her to him. The day was already gray. And here and there early workers were hurrying downtown. But they seemed of a different world from that in which Emily found herself. There was something ineffably dreary about those drab figures, scurrying along through the chill dawn. Their shuffling gait, their thin, shoddy clothes, bespoke the unending, hopeless struggle that made up their existence. They fought on—those dismal wretches—for the mere sake of drawing breath.

Emily shuddered as she realized how narrow had been her own escape from just that kind of fate. And her savior, Mercer, as he felt the tremor that passed over her, held her closer.

"I hate to go home," Emily had said. Mercer pondered over that sentence, as they spun along. . . . After all, why should they go home?

The day following the Costume Ball Emily rose late. To her surprise, she was not tired at all. Her abundant vitality had never been sapped by late hours or dissipation. And though she reviewed the events of the previous night with something like mild regret—because they were gone—she was supremely happy.

Emily's outlook on life had changed. Insensibly she had become inoculated with the virus which was at work among the people with whom she had come in contact, since she had begun posing for Mercer. When she first came to New York her thoughts had dwelt on work, on success, on fame. The more material things, the luxuries and shallow pleasures which she had been tasting of late, had never entered into her calculations.

In her unworldliness Emily could not perceive that Mercer and Langdon, Taylor Thorpe and a score of other well-known people whom she had met had fallen from what had once been a plane of endeavor as high as her own had been. They were victims who had suc-

cumbed to the pleasures of the flesh; and they had basely made their God-given talent serve unworthy ends.

Emily Fraser was still not beyond hope. She was yet merely on the threshold of the hectic world in which her new-found friends dwelt. But the vista that stretched out before her enthralled her. And she desired eagerly to explore its alluring labyrinths.

She did not know how near she had come, already, to wandering down the flower-strewn way which beckons so invitingly to hundreds of girls in her position. She had been close to the primrose path.

But Mercer—for some reason which he himself could not fathom—Mercer had taken her straight home from the ball.

And it was not like Mercer to play Sir Galahad.

Emily dressed quickly. And as soon as she had finished her combined breakfast and luncheon she started for Mercer's studio. He had asked her to pose for him that afternoon, for

he was ready to begin the illustrations for Hasbrook's novel, "The Pillagers."

Not since her first call on Mercer, when she had sent in her card, with its brave and pathetic little legend, "Illustrator and Designer," had she felt any hesitancy about going to his studio. But now, with the exhilaration of the ball, its gay costumes, its atmosphere of revelry dissipated in the bright sunshine of the winter afternoon, Emily was conscious of a feeling of uneasiness. How would Mercer meet her? She had already begun to regret the intimacies she had permitted him; and she wondered whether he would expect her to continue making similar concessions.

But as soon as she entered the studio her fears were promptly dispelled. She found Alan Hasbrook and Mercer deep in a discussion of the drawings for "The Pillagers." And Mercer's greeting was no different from what it had always been before.

It was now several months since Hasbrook had first met Emily—on the occasion of his first

call at Mercer's workshop. He remembered her perfectly. And being a keen observer, he immediately discovered the subtle changes already wrought in her. They were as apparent to him as were the fresh color in her cheeks and the rebelliousness of the wisps of insistent curls which the wind had coaxed from the concealment which their owner had attempted to impose upon them.

Hasbrook saw that Emily was breaking out of her chrysalis. New York had already set its mark upon her—at least so far as her clothes were concerned. There was no longer anything about her costume that even faintly suggested East Oldport.

Emily was as chic as any of the thousands of chorus girls and millionaires' daughters and stenographers who ornament the streets of the metropolis. What though her silver-fox furs were the most flagrant imitation, and her little black velvet turban bore a Sixth instead of a Fifth Avenue label? Those were details which matter little to the masculine

mind—however much importance they may assume in woman's.

Hasbrook saw that Emily was now essentially of the city.

CHAPTER IX

THE JOY-RIDERS

It was May, and the great out-of-doors called insistently to Emily. New York, to her surprise, did not seem quite the paradise that she had supposed it invariably to be. It was irksome to pose patiently and look out over the tender green of the Park trees, where the squirrels were frisking about and children were playing under the vigilant eyes of their nurses. Emily's thoughts wandered to East Oldport and she began to wish that she might go back, to sniff the salt in the air and watch all the growing things unfold themselves.

But she could not leave town, then. Mercer was working steadily on a series of magazine covers. And he had made her promise that she would not desert him until they were finished.

Fortunately there were periods of pleasure to break the monotony of work. Mercer had bought a new car; and often, after the light had begun to fade and he could no longer trust his judgment of color, he would invite Emily to go for a ride with him.

They were heavenly—those snatches of country that Emily saw, as they dashed along the north shore of the Sound into Connecticut, or across the East River and far out over the rolling distances of Long Island. Then would follow a dinner at some inn, and afterward the flight homeward, with the night wind blowing fresh against their faces as they swept along. Sometimes Emily and Mercer fared forth alone; sometimes Art Langdon and Maisie—or some other couple—went with them. It mattered little to Emily who it might be.

On one particularly beautiful day Mercer threw down his palette and brushes before the afternoon was half over.

"I can't stick at this any longer!" he exclaimed. "I can't stand it to stay indoors on a

day like this. Let's get Art and Maisie and take a spin out on the Boston Post Road."

Emily was charmed. Mercer telephoned to his friends; and in a short quarter of an hour the four of them were on their way uptown.

The fever of the spring had crept into Mercer's blood. Crouched behind the wheel of his under-slung foreign car he took little part in the chatter of his three companions; his whole interest seemed to lie in putting the city far behind him. So long as they had to make their way haltingly through the thronging traffic he chafed under the delays. But once upon the Grand Concourse, beyond the Harlem River, he cast all speed regulations to the winds. Pelham, Mamaroneck, Larchmont, flickered past them; and soon they were in Connecticut.

"You ought to like this," Mercer said to Emily. "You're back in New England now. And I must say I like it myself—to-day. I've half a mind to come out here to live this summer. The trouble is, it's so terribly quiet—after New

York. I'm afraid I'd go insane, just listening to my own thoughts."

"Don't drive so fast!" Maisie called.

"I thought you never could ride fast enough," Mercer replied.

"I have to-day," she said. "It seemed as if I would blow away, some of the time."

"Better ease her up a bit, Van," Langdon said. "Some of these country constables will nab you if you're not careful. They like New York money, you know. It's a wonder you haven't been held up already."

"He went so fast they couldn't see him," said Maisie. "I seen one cop back there blinking as if he wondered what was going by. Gee! All we made was a yellow streak."

Once Van Mercer would have shuddered at the havoc that the pretty Maisie occasionally wrought upon the English language. But he had long since grown accustomed to her grammatical, as well as her other lapses. He accepted everything as a matter of course.

As for Emily, she sometimes wondered how

Langdon could tolerate Maisie's constant companionship. Even her prettiness and usual good nature seemed hardly to counterbalance the shortcomings of her diction. But Art seemed oblivious to Maisie's lack of culture. Apparently her comradeship was complete enough to compensate him for any minor deficiencies.

Far up in the Connecticut hills they stopped at a cozy road-house for dinner. The long ride had given them all excellent appetites; and they paid their host the compliment of doing his tempting dishes full justice. Maisie, in particular, fell upon her food in a way which could have left no doubt—in the most incredulous mind—as to her appreciation of it.

The ride had made them thirsty, too; and when they rose from the table it seemed to Emily that Mercer was not quite so untouched by the alcohol he had drunk as was usually the case with him. Maisie and Art were obviously exhilarated.

Long past dark they started homeward. It was a wonderful night. There was a moon—

just approaching the full—and the air was redolent of blossoms. To Emily it was as if she had been transported into fairyland, as if she were borne on the wind through a country which was too beautiful to be real.

Mercer drove like a demon. If he had merely driven fast during the afternoon, he was driving recklessly now. Maisie and Art, in the tonneau, did not seem to care at what speed they went. Their brains were too muddled by the drinks they had consumed to retain any thought of caution. No doubt they would both have protested vehemently if anybody had asserted they were the worse for liquor. But the fact remained that they were lulled into a false sense of security, like many other joy-riders who come to grief because they have dined too well.

Mercer only laughed when Emily gave a little cry of alarm as they skidded around a corner. And he pressed his foot further down upon the accelerator. They were going at the speed of a limited train. And as they approached a cross-road Emily thought she caught the

screech of a horn. But the wind roared in her ears and she could not be sure.

Still Mercer tore on. The cross-road was screened by a bank, topped by a thick hedge. And as their car swept on a shaft of light from their right shot directly across their path.

Mercer had no time then to sound his horn. It was too late to do anything except to try to scrape past to safety. He turned far out to the left and put on more speed. The car swerved, staggered past the crossing of the roads, and won clear of the other car. It seemed as if they were safe.

But they were in the ditch, and though Mercer tugged desperately at the wheel he could not gain the hard road again. He was conscious of a strange feeling of helplessness as all his pulling brought no result. He was amazed, stupefied.

It was all over in another moment. A tire exploded with a loud report. A grinding, ripping, sickening crash immediately followed; and Emily felt the car slip from under her.

That was when she was thrown; but she did not know it, then.

A light tap sounded upon the door of the sick-room; and the capable white-capped nurse opened it noiselessly.

"Any developments, Miss Johnson?" It was Alan Hasbrook who waited anxiously in the hall, for news of the girl who had been brought to his house the night before. "Has she regained consciousness?" he asked.

The nurse shook her head.

"No! But her respiration is much slower. That's a good symptom."

Hasbrook nodded.

"Dr. Gould said he'd call again at about ten o'clock. Let me know what he says, please."

Downstairs, in his study, Hasbrook found his chum Burchard waiting for him, just back from the hospital a mile away.

"Well, Hilary——" Hasbrook looked at the artist inquiringly.

"They're getting along as well as could be

expected," Burchard told him. "Mercer seems to have escaped with nothing more serious than a cracked rib and a badly sprained knee. Of course, he's a mass of bruises and lacerations, but they seem to be only surface injuries. He's suffering from shock, the doctor says. It's a wonder he wasn't killed outright—pinned beneath the wheel as he was."

"What about the others?"

"They think Langdon may have a slight concussion of the brain. His right leg's broken in two places. But they say he'll pull through all right. . . . And the girl who was with him was sitting up in bed and eating her breakfast when I saw her. In fact, she was asking for more, and didn't like it at all because she couldn't get it. She thought they ought to let her have steak. She's what I should call robust. . . . Lord! if I'd gone through such an experience my nerves would be shattered for life."

"Her nervous system's not so delicately strung as yours, Hilary. The lady's not exactly

of what you'd term the intellectual type, you know. Her sort dies hard."

"What about the little lady upstairs, Alan?" Burchard asked his friend.

Hasbrook looked grave as his thoughts turned to the stricken girl who lay in his best guest-chamber.

"Miss Johnson says she is breathing a little better. That's about all there is to say, apparently. Gould's coming in to see her again a bit later in the morning. Meanwhile I'll have to find some way of readjusting my bachelor house, Hilary. I'm afraid I'll have to entice somebody in as a chaperone. There's no knowing what Miss Fraser's injuries may develop into. . . . She may be here a long time." The thought of the unexpected advent of several women into his home was the least bit disconcerting to a confirmed bachelor like Hasbrook. He liked the way his house was ordered. It suited his habits of work to perfection. And now he would have to rearrange his whole scheme of daily life to a new schedule. He was not so selfish, how-

ever, as to give the prospect more than a passing thought.

"Tell you what, Alan!" Burchard exclaimed, as a sudden inspiration came over him. "You have your man drive me over to my place and I'll bring my aunt back with me."

"I hate to ask her, Hilary." Nevertheless, Hasbrook was impressed by Burchard's suggestion. There was no one whom he would rather welcome into his household than Miss Adeline Burchard. "I hate to inconvenience her," he repeated.

"Pshaw—why not, Alan? She'd do anything for you, gladly."

"Yes—I know. But wouldn't it be imposing on her good nature? This accident's already in the papers; and we'll be pestered by reporters—had you thought of that?" Hasbrook looked at his friend anxiously. "The notoriety couldn't help being distasteful to your aunt. . . . Oh, I know she'd never complain. But——"

"Bosh! You leave it to me. I'll go over

right now. I'll bring her back with me this very morning. She won't forgive you if you get anybody else, Alan. You don't know Aunt Adeline. Underneath all her primness she's a mighty good sport. And she thinks you are the finest ever."

Miss Adeline Burchard waited to hear only the briefest outline of the story that her nephew brought to her.

"Of course I'll come, Hilary. And I'll stay just as long as that poor young woman is in Alan's house. He was an angel to take her in. It's just like the dear boy. . . . I'll be ready in ten minutes. Matilda can pack a trunk for me later and send it over this afternoon."

Hasbrook was unquestionably relieved by the arrival of Miss Burchard. He had felt useless and inept, with the injured girl unceremoniously introduced into his *ménage*. To be sure, there was the nurse—as well as the doctor—to look after her. And Hasbrook's servants were only too eager to do everything they could to help.

But there still seemed to be a lack such as only a capable, motherly woman could fill.

"You're a real friend, Miss Burchard," Hasbrook said, as he helped Hilary's aunt out of the car—"I never knew how utterly useless a man could be," and he shook hands gratefully with the white-haired, distinguished-looking woman.

"Hold on there!" Hilary interrupted. "Speak for yourself, if you want to. But not for me, please! I want some credit for knowing what to do. Haven't I saved the day? Haven't I brought up reinforcements?"

"You certainly have, my boy," Hasbrook laughed. "And in recognition of your gallant services you may consider yourself Miss Burchard's chief-of-staff. She's in command so long as she stays here."

Miss Adeline Burchard proceeded forthwith to exercise her authority in no uncertain manner. Having first assured herself that Emily was in competent hands—that nurse Johnson was entirely fitted to care for her patient—Hil-

ary's aunt began a thoroughly feminine reorganization of Hasbrook's bachelor establishment. Her housewifely mind was staggered by many details which had always completely escaped Alan's notice. He was habitually too intent upon his work to notice dust in out-of-the-way corners. If the curtains of his chambers were not of the crispest, he was never aware of the ignominy. Nor did it ever occur to him that there were a score of other niceties of housekeeping in which his half-directed servants had been remiss.

But to Miss Burchard all such matters were affairs of the utmost importance. She reveled in her opportunity to set Hasbrook's house to rights. And though her nephew—and Alan, too—rallied her upon her industry, and likened her task to the feat of cleaning the Augean stables, the good lady would not be dissuaded.

"I'm so glad to be able to do something for you, Alan," she said. "I've always felt that you ought not to be living here alone, at the mercy of your servants. No man knows how

to manage a house. . . . You ought to get married."

Hilary and Alan appeared vastly amused by her opinions.

"Oh! you may laugh," she said to the two men, as they sat at the dinner-table on the first day of her arrival. "No doubt you think I'm a silly old woman. But when Alan finds himself married to some nice girl he'll realize what he has been missing all these years."

"Alan married! Ha, ha!" The idea struck Hilary as most entertaining. "Don't you know he's wedded to his work, Aunt? And a man can't serve two mistresses. . . . Would you have him give up his writing?"

"I know Miss Burchard's too polite to say it —but probably she thinks I would write a great deal better if I were married," Hasbrook ventured.

"Your outlook would be broadened, no doubt," the good lady said.

"Well—I'm afraid I'm doomed to my present horizon," Hasbrook rejoined. "But I must say

the thing—marriage, I mean—begins to have its attractions for me. This dinner, now. . . . It's a much better one than my cook usually gives me."

"That's because it's properly planned, my dear," Hilary's aunt told him. A warm glow of satisfaction suffused her, because of Hasbrook's appreciation of her efforts. "It's a balanced meal. Your cook was stuffing you with proteids. It's a wonder your system hasn't broken down under such heavy fare as you've been accustomed to."

"You've saved my life, Miss Burchard—if you can only show cook the error of her ways," Alan rejoined. "At least, I know I'm safe as long as you stay here. And that may be for several weeks, according to Dr. Gould. He tells me that Miss Fraser needs good nursing in a quiet, restful place, to give her nerves a chance to recover from the shock they underwent. The doctor suggested moving her to Oak Ridge Sanitarium in a few days. But it doesn't seem to me that she ought to be disturbed—that is, if

it won't be imposing upon you too much, Miss Burchard."

"My dear boy! I shall enjoy every minute of my stay here. It's a vacation for me." And there was no doubt of the good lady's sincerity. Her motherly heart was big enough to know no limits.

When Emily regained consciousness she found herself gripping her nurse's hand. It was bewildering, to find herself in bed in a strange room. But Miss Johnson's kind face reassured her.

"Don't try to talk, dearie!" the nurse said. "There was an accident—that's all. But it's all over; and you're going to be all right. You're with friends, too."

An accident! Emily wondered what it might have been. She had no recollection, then, of the automobile ride. And for the time being she was content to lie still and let her eyes wander idly upon her surroundings. It was a very pretty room in which Emily found herself. She

liked the quaintness of its colonial furniture, and the flowered wallpaper. Through one of the windows she could catch a glimpse of a green hill; and she could hear birds twittering in an old apple tree which reached out a blossoming bough as if to welcome her. But she did not ask any questions, then. She felt unutterably tired. And it seemed to her that she would be content to rest in that heavenly place forever.

Later, when the doctor had come again and pronounced her out of danger and suffering principally from shock, the nurse told Emily where she was.

So she was in Mr. Hasbrook's house! "And he says you are to stay here until you are quite well again," Miss Johnson explained, with ready assurance.

The tears would fill Emily's eyes. She had always thought that Hasbrook had a fine, noble face, in spite of all the derogatory remarks Mercer and his friends had made about him. Now she knew that he was kind, at least.

When Miss Burchard came to Emily's bedside and smiled down at her, Emily lost her heart at once to that charming lady.

"You are all so good!" Emily said, in a choking voice. "Why should you be so good to me?"

"Because you're a poor, hurt little bird. And we want to see you hopping around once more," Hilary's aunt said. "Besides—it's Mr. Hasbrook who's kind. It's his house, you know. I'm merely a guest—the same as you."

Emily could only press the capable hand of her fellow guest. Her heart was too full for utterance. She hoped that Maisie and Mercer and Langdon were as well cared for.

"They're getting along nicely," Miss Johnson assured her, when Emily inquired about her friends. "Don't you worry about them!"

Three days passed before Emily had a chance to thank her host in person. Her nurse had propped her up on an armful of pillows, and dressed her hair, and performed all the other

services to make her comfortable that only one woman can do for another.

It was then that Hasbrook came in to see her.

CHAPTER X

THE CHANGING HORIZON

"How considerate you were, to pick out this place for the scene of your smash-up!" Hasbrook said to Emily, smiling.

"Oh! I've made you endless trouble, I know," she told him.

"Not at all! If there's anybody for us to thank—you and me—it's Miss Burchard. She's the good angel of the place."

"She's wonderful, isn't she?" Emily said. "I don't think I ever knew any one quite like her." She had completely lost her heart to Hilary's aunt, just as every one did who came in contact with her.

"She's a mother to all of us," Hasbrook rejoined. "And she really enjoys mothering as many people as she can get hold of. The more

there are for her to look out for, the happier she is. I suppose she feels grateful to you for giving her a chance to take care of you."

Emily's eyes filled as she regarded the master of the house.

"There's little use of my talking about ever trying to repay you," she said. "You're all so kind to me! And what can I ever do to make up for it?" she asked hopelessly.

"Bless you!" Hasbrook exclaimed. "All you need do to make us happy is to become well and happy yourself. That's all we want. That's reward enough—if any reward is due. . . . I mustn't stay too long, and tire you. Miss Johnson will be giving me a scolding if I do. After a few days we hope to get you downstairs, and out in the garden where you can bask in the sunshine and grow tanned and strong in our good, fresh country air. . . . Do you think you'll like that?" He talked to her much as he would have talked to a child; indeed, she seemed little more than a helpless child to him, wan and wistful and dependent.

"I'll love it!" Emily answered. The thought of the flowers and the green grass and the sunshine was alluring. "But you're going to spoil me, Mr. Hasbrook," she protested weakly. "I won't ever want to go back to New York again."

"Just forget New York, for the present," Hasbrook advised her; and a shadow crossed his face momentarily, as he recalled the conditions to which she must eventually return.

"Do you know, Alan, that's a very sweet girl we have here?" Miss Burchard asked Hasbrook a little later. "I can't quite connect her, logically, with one of those roistering motor parties."

"Nor I, my dear lady! And I don't think she is really their sort at all. It was just an accident, I judge—her being thrown in with Mercer's set. The girl had to earn her living, you know. And she fell in with the wrong people." Hasbrook's remarks were not merely intended to quiet any possible doubts of Miss Burchard's as to the status of their involuntary

patient. He was honestly convinced of Emily's lack of sophistication. He felt sure that she was worthy of their kindest opinions.

"Well! If she fell in with objectionable companions, she's fallen *out* now, thank goodness!" Miss Burchard exclaimed fervently. "I don't intend to let her ever go back to that environment, either. We'll have to find something else for her to do, Alan, besides posing for such artists as Mercer. . . . What *can* her family be thinking of, I wonder?"

"They're just honest, unsuspecting country people, apparently," Hasbrook said. "I don't imagine they have any realization of what New York is like. And I suppose they are too poor to be able to investigate, even if they were moved by some inspiration to look into their daughter's surroundings."

"Dear me!" Hilary's aunt sighed. "I suppose there are many girls who come to New York just as she did—to make their way all alone. Some of them get on safely, I dare say. And some of them don't—poor things!"

"It's a hard world for most of them," Hasbrook observed.

He did not like to think of the unwholesome atmosphere of Mercer's studio. It struck him as a most undesirable place in which a young woman should receive her first impressions of city life.

"Yes, Alan! . . . Do you know—I'm thankful that accident happened?" Miss Burchard said. "I actually believe that Providence brought it about—so that we could help this dear child. It's not too late, I feel sure. She's just a sweet, innocent girl; and if we let her go back to associate with those terrible people I'd never forgive myself so long as I lived. . . . Why, Alan! She's so different from that Vincent woman—that Maisie! When I called at the hospital I could hardly understand the—er—the person's language, it was so full of strange expressions. And no doubt she might have been helped, too, if some one had only had the opportunity."

Hasbrook was more sceptical. He had had

a longer acquaintance with the "person" in question.

"I'm afraid you would have had a more difficult task with Miss Maisie," he said. "She seems to fit into her surroundings in New York very easily."

"That only goes to show what evil associations will do for one," the optimistic Miss Burchard replied. "I believe there's good in everybody—fundamentally. I'm not one of your Calvinists, who separate humanity into the sheep and the goats—the elect and the—er—the——"

"Let me say it for you, Aunt—the damned!" Hilary Burchard interrupted wickedly. He had entered the room in time to hear his aunt's remark.

For Emily the days that followed were full of unalloyed delight. After a breakfast in bed—for Miss Burchard would not allow her to come down to the breakfast-room, even after she grew stronger—Emily spent the mornings out

of doors. Hasbrook's old-fashioned garden claimed a part of her time. Every morning there were further discoveries for her to make in it, for the approaching summer brought its new wonders each day. There were seats beneath the trees that flanked the house and Emily reveled in sitting there and resting, and reading a bit now and then. A dozen times during a morning Miss Burchard would snatch a few minutes from her zealous oversight of Hasbrook's establishment and join Emily. The girl grew to treasure those fleeting moments.

As for Hasbrook—Emily never saw him until luncheon time. He was up early each day and hard at work until one o'clock. But in the afternoon he found time to devote himself to Miss Burchard and Emily.

Hilary Burchard left the house each morning and drove home in his roadster, to work in his studio. Late in the day he would return to Hasbrook's place, arriving usually in time to have tea.

Afternoon tea was one of the innovations

which Miss Burchard had introduced into Hasbrook's household. It amused Hilary, to see the ascetic Alan sipping his tea and consuming cakes with gusto. But he did not rally his chum upon his lapse from the Spartan existence he had been wont to follow of old. There was a certain reason which held Hilary back.

He had noticed something that interested him tremendously. It had not escaped his observant eye that when not working Hasbrook was generally to be found in Emily's company. At first Hilary was inclined to ascribe Hasbrook's marked attentions to Emily as merely evidence of a host's desire that his guest be made comfortable and that she should not be allowed to become homesick and restless. But it struck Hilary that as the patient's need for attendance —for such courtesies as pillows tucked behind her, and rugs spread over her—decreased, Alan grew only the more assiduous in his devotion.

Could it be possible that Hasbrook was interested in his guest in a way that was more than merely hospitable?

Hilary broached the subject to his aunt one day when the two were alone. And that good lady, with characteristic feminine subtlety, would admit nothing of the sort. Secretly, however, she was pleased that her own suspicions were confirmed. But she was too astute to let her nephew know that. On the contrary, she laughed at his suggestion, and told him that he was a match-making busybody. And then she proceeded to find numerous duties indoors, which kept her from joining Emily and Hasbrook when they were together. And often she smiled to herself.

So Emily and her host found themselves left much to their own devices. They walked together, and talked. Sometimes Hasbrook would read aloud. And as Emily grew more like her former self he took her for drives through the countryside—not in his car, because she could not yet endure to ride in one, but behind a fat cob which was one of Hasbrook's cherished retainers and which he had never allowed the modern motor car wholly to displace.

As the days sped into weeks all her new associates made a profound impression upon Emily. She could not help recognizing the fact that they lived in a different world from that in which her New York friends disported themselves. Their interests, their point of view, their whole attitude toward life, were a revelation to her. Here the talk turned upon matters of real moment. They discussed books, pictures, politics and great events that were happening abroad. Sometimes it was music that claimed their attention; sometimes it was travel. What delighted Emily most of all, perhaps, was to hear of the far-off lands her newfound friends had visited, the interesting things they had seen, the quaint peoples—their dress and their customs.

Hasbrook's library was full of books of travel; and under this new stimulus Emily spent hours in reading them. Heretofore her conception of the world had hardly extended beyond New York. New York had sufficed for her intimates in the city. And unconsciously

she had viewed the universe through their short-sighted and morally astigmatic eyes.

Emily began to realize, at last, the pettiness and sordidness and narrowness of the life led by Mercer and his cronies. In Mercer's studio the chatter always turned upon personalities, or upon such momentous questions as what restaurant served the most palatable lobster à la Newburg, and what café yielded the best Scotch. Cabarets, frivolous plays, fashions—such frippery had always claimed the attention of her friends in town. They had no interests more substantial than those. But now Emily saw that there were things really worth while, that there was a universe full of wonders waiting for her to discover them. She began to feel ashamed of her ignorance; and she resolved that she would study without ceasing until she, too, could take an intelligent part in such conversations as she now merely listened to. She was tired of staring blankly when some one mentioned a foreign city, or an opera, or a literary classic, of which she had never heard

before. And she registered a solemn vow that if effort could accomplish anything for her she would be ignorant no longer.

"Oh! there's so much to learn!" she exclaimed to Hasbrook one day. "I don't know where to begin. I wish you'd help me!" she said appealingly.

"There's nothing that would please me more," he declared, "if I can be of any assistance to you. . . . Suppose you start on a definite course of reading. . . . You can learn a good deal, simply by dipping into books of all sorts. But it's better not to scatter your fire too much. You'd get further by taking up one thing at a time and doing that one thing thoroughly. . . . What do you think you'd like to study first?"

"Art!" Emily exclaimed, without a moment's hesitation. "I thought I was an artist, once, because I can draw a little. But now I see that I never had the faintest conception of art. I know nothing at all about it. And I don't believe half the people who call them-

selves artists know much about it, either."

Hasbrook smiled.

"I'm sure they don't," he said. "If they did, they'd never perpetrate the chromos they do. To be sure, art is a pretty big subject, and a pretty elusive one, too. Furthermore, I make no pretense of knowing anything about it myself. I've a good many books, however, that will teach you what the famous artists have done, and give you the opinions of the great critics.

"If you want to make a systematic study of the history of art you ought to begin at the beginning. Egyptian art is about the oldest we know of. Here's a book that you'd better read first." He went to one of his bookcases and drew a bulky volume from one of the shelves. "I hope you won't be discouraged when I tell you this will be only one of many that you'll have to read."

But Emily was not in the least disheartened. On the contrary, she was enchanted. And straightway she entered upon her task—though

it was hardly a task, but rather a sheer delight for her.

The time fairly flew by in that fairyland—for so Hasbrook's house seemed to Emily. But amid all her happiness one disconcerting fact began to obtrude itself insistently upon her consciousness. The day was fast approaching when she could no longer accept Hasbrook's hospitality. Indeed, she told herself that she had never had any right to be there in his house. She had no claim upon him. And if he had chosen to play the Good Samaritan when she was injured and helpless there certainly could be no valid reason for allowing him to continue to house her.

She told Hasbrook as much one day. But he protested that she must not think of leaving until she was quite strong again.

"But I am strong," she rejoined. "I never felt better in my life."

"I don't think you're well enough to travel yet," he objected. "You'd not go to New York, certainly, just as hot weather is beginning.

And you'd find the trip home more tiring than you realize."

On the whole, Emily found Hasbrook's conversation, on that particular subject, to be far from satisfactory. She told Miss Burchard as much, one day.

"I really must insist on not staying here any longer," she said. "I feel that I've already imposed upon the kindness of you all too long as it is."

"My dear child—we've enjoyed having you here more than I can tell you," Miss Burchard protested. "But I understand your feeling. And I won't urge you to stay. I'm going to be very selfish, however. I'm going to take you home with me for a few weeks."

And in spite of everything that Emily could do, Hilary's aunt would have her way. The upshot of the matter was that another week-end found Emily at Beech Knoll, the Burchard's home.

CHAPTER XI

ALAN MISSES SOMETHING

Adeline Burchard had not invited Emily to her house without a motive other than that which sprang naturally from her hospitable heart. She had conceived a genuine affection for the girl, and desired her companionship.

Hilary's movements were always uncertain. There was no knowing when he might take it into his head to leave on a long trip, to California, or the West Indies, or some more remote place, either in the interests of some magazine, or for the sake of the impressions that he usually received from such journeyings. His aunt always dreaded those jaunts. She hated to be left alone. And now she saw no reason —if she could once entice Emily beneath her

roof-tree—why the girl should not be kept there indefinitely, or permanently. The project appealed to her compellingly.

Adeline Burchard was entirely too astute to drop any hint of her plan to the unsuspecting Emily. There were details of the scheme which had yet to be worked out. She knew that she must devise some pretense of a basis which would satisfy Emily's theories as to her obligation to make equitable return for value received. So for the present Miss Burchard was content merely to retain Emily as her guest so long as she could, without making any disclosure of her pet project until time should make such a step necessary.

The good lady justified her plan to herself by the reflection that at all hazards Emily must not be allowed to return to New York, to fall once more under the influence of the studio clique. That she would be gaining a foster daughter Adeline Burchard considered her own good fortune. She could not herself have told which prospect pleased her the more. At all

events, she derived great satisfaction from her scheme.

After Emily's removal to Beech Knoll Hasbrook made frequent visits to the Burchards' house. Never did more than two or three days elapse without his running over in his car, for tea, or dinner, or to spend an evening.

Insensibly Emily had grown to look forward to his coming. She was progressing famously with her reading. And she always had a grist of questions stored up for Hasbrook's solving, whenever he came. Sometimes he was at a loss to clear away the difficulties that Emily set before him. And then they would call upon Miss Burchard and Hilary—if he was at home—to thresh out the knotty problems with them.

Hasbrook, too, had gradually rearranged his long-established routine to make a place for this new interest that had insinuated itself into his life. Once he would have scoffed had any one told him that he would have set aside so much of his time for the mere making of calls.

But now it seemed to him one of the most reasonable procedures in the world.

At last, after she had passed several weeks at Beech Knoll, Emily came to Miss Burchard one day with a letter in her hand, which she had just been reading.

"It's from Mr. Mercer," she explained. "He writes me that he has quite recovered from his accident. And he wants me to come back to town and begin posing for him again."

"My dear Emily! It's out of the question!" Miss Burchard exclaimed. "I couldn't think of letting you go back to the city in this heat," she went on, firmly. "And to pose—of all things! You'd be ill in a week's time."

"Oh! I think I'm well enough," Emily assured her. "It is warm, I know. But Mr. Mercer says he must finish his drawings at once. Some of them are to be used this fall, and he was in the hospital so long that there's very little time in which to finish them. . . . I really ought to go, to help him. And I ought to begin my own work again, too. I've felt

guilty for a long time. I've felt like a 'slacker,' as the English call the men who won't enlist and won't work at home either."

Miss Burchard laughed. She had no intention of being circumvented by a slip of a girl.

"That's your New England conscience—you dear little Puritan! But I'm not going to let you go. Now what do you say to that?" she asked with playful severity.

"You're so kind to me!" Emily choked. "It's just like you—to urge me to stay. But I must not impose upon your hospitality any longer."

"You're not 'imposing.' You've been doing me a favor, ever since you came here," Miss Burchard insisted. "But I don't suppose you'll ever look at things from my point of view. If you only could understand how much it means to an old woman like me to have a young girl in her house, to talk to, and fuss over, and give advice to (Hilary's always telling me how fond I am of giving advice!), and to look at, you'd

realize what a great pleasure you've been giving me.

"Now, I know that you have your mind set on going on with your drawing. And I know, too, that you are determined to be self-supporting. So I have evolved a plan that concerns us both. . . . Why not come here to live, permanently, as—as a sort of companion? I suppose that's the word we'd have to use—only I always think of a companion as being some woe-begone, dowdy spinster who has a red nose and dusts the bric-a-brac and does the family mending, and dines alone on odds and ends—unless she's needed to prevent there being thirteen at table.

"I wouldn't want to make a household drudge of you, my dear. Don't be afraid of that! I just want you here for your own sweet self—for the sunshine you'd bring with you, that I might hear you laugh now and then, and see your eyes light up, and help you plan your pretty gowns, and—have you for a daughter, as long as I might." To her own surprise, Adeline Burchard's eyes filled with tears. Her pet

project had struck nearer her heart than she had suspected. "Don't say 'No!'" she said impulsively, as Emily hesitated, quite at a loss for words. "You can study here. You can even go to town for lessons, if you like. And Hilary will do everything he can to help you with your drawings."

Emily regarded the good woman through a mist. Her own eyes were brimming. And then she suddenly dropped her head upon her hands and sobbed like a child.

When Hasbrook came in, an hour later, he found them both radiant. Emily had agreed to Miss Burchard's proposal. But she had stipulated that a certain share of the oversight of Beech Knoll should fall upon her shoulders—for she felt that she had no right to accept Miss Burchard's terms without performing some duty in return.

"You see what a fortunate accident that was, Alan—" the delighted spinster said. "Poor Emily had to pay for it by weeks of suffering —I'm sorry for that. But I'm the gainer. It's

the proverbial ill wind. But now I've got her I shall take good care that nothing happens to her again," Miss Burchard's eyes looked at him triumphantly. "You ought to thank me, young man, for keeping this young lady in this neighborhood," she said.

"I do, devoutly," he assured her. "I only wish you'd adopt me, too."

"You're a flatterer," she retorted. "You know you love your monkish life."

But Hasbrook was beginning to question the advantages of his lonely existence. To be sure, it was only lately that he had been aware of any lack in his home. Once he had found his work, and his books, his horse and his dog, sufficient unto his needs. But now there was a strange emptiness within the walls of his country-house. It oppressed him, sometimes. And he found himself restless.

Of old, he had never been lonely. And now there were days when he missed something—an intangible something that he could not quite define.

CHAPTER XII

THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS

Spring had come again. The snow on the Connecticut hills had long since made its retreat under the assault of the warm sunshine. And every day did its share toward decking the country-side with added greenery.

Hasbrook had seized a two weeks' respite from work after finishing another novel and had gone to Virginia to pay a visit to an old friend.

Beech Knoll in the meantime had missed his presence; for Hasbrook had become almost as much a part of the household as its legitimate members. Both Emily and Miss Burchard had found the days to drag perceptibly during his absence. Hilary had been away for months on a trip down the west coast of South America,

where he was making drawings for a series of travel articles for a magazine, and the two women felt quite deserted.

At last one night Hasbrook telephoned to Emily that he was home again. And the following afternoon he came to the Burchards' house. Emily had thrilled as she heard his voice over the telephone. And now in his presence she was more elated than she liked. Alan Hasbrook had come to mean much to her. And she was not at all pleased that it was so.

"How brown you are, dear!" Miss Burchard exclaimed when she greeted him. "I wish you could stay like that. But I know you can hardly wait to coop yourself up in your study and write another book. I dare say you've already begun one this very day."

"Your intuition is unerring," Hasbrook laughed. "But the days can't all be holidays with us scribblers, you know. When the works are shut down the production stops short."

"That's what Hilary's always telling us.

But he has a way of getting vacations along with his work."

"Yes—he's lucky," Hasbrook said. "How is the dear boy? Have you heard from him lately?"

Miss Burchard nodded.

"A week ago, wasn't it, Emily? He's well; though he wrote that he wished he might have some of our good cooking again. That's like him. He always appreciates his home most when he's away from it. . . . He's gone more and more all the time. I wish we could persuade you to come over here until he returns," with characteristic hospitality.

"Thank you—for the invitation and the compliment as well. But I know you'd regret your bargain, if I came. You don't know how disagreeable I am when I'm beginning a new book. I think they hated to see me back home again —even old John, the gardener, and he's generally devoted to me.

"By the way, he gave me something to-day that may belong to you, Miss Emily." Has-

brook drew a small glistening object from his pocket and handed it to the girl.

"My locket!" she cried. "Where did he get it? I thought it was gone forever."

"He came across it when he was edging the grass by the roadside, right where you had your smash-up."

"I'm *so* glad!" Emily said. "You don't know how much it means to me. I was wearing it, of course, on that dreadful ride. But afterward I couldn't remember having it on. And when my things were packed up and sent on from New York I hunted and hunted through them, trying to find this. I thought some one must have taken it, while I was ill." She turned to Miss Burchard. "See!" she said. "It is my most valued possession."

The fastening of the trinket had been broken while it had lain during those months in the ditch. And as Miss Burchard took the locket in her hand it fell open.

"Where did you get this?" she asked Emily. "Tell me, child—are you sure this is yours?"

"Why—yes—I've had it all my life," Emily answered wonderingly. "I've had it longer than anything else I possess."

"Who—who is this?" Hilary's aunt demanded, as she gazed at the tiny portrait which looked out from behind the oval bit of glass.

"I've always supposed it was my mother," the girl said quietly. "I've never told you—it didn't seem necessary—it's something that happened so long ago that I've come to regard it as interesting only to myself. You see, Mr. and Mrs. Fraser are not my own parents. I never knew who my own people were. . . . There was a shipwreck—years ago—and I was washed ashore. I was little more than a baby, and of course I don't remember about it at all. Some one had tied me to a life-raft, they say, and I was the only one saved.

"This locket was on a chain about my neck. That was the only clue to my identity, and it was never solved. The Frasers had no children; and they took me in and did the best they could for me, always. They did everything for

me that they would have done for a child of their own. . . . Oh! What is it? What's the matter?"

Hilary's aunt had suddenly collapsed. She had not spoken—except for one sharp, agonized cry.

"She's fainted, I think! . . . Some water, quick!" Hasbrook ordered. He had swiftly caught the swaying figure in his arms and laid his burden tenderly upon the couch nearby.

When Emily returned with water and smelling salts she found Hasbrook chafing the stricken woman's hands.

"Is she subject to these turns?" he asked.

"I never knew that she was," said Emily. "Oh! I hope it's nothing serious!"

They were both immeasurably relieved, a few minutes later, when they saw the closed eyelids flutter. And soon Adeline Burchard looked up at them in a dazed fashion.

"You stay with her while I telephone for the doctor," Hasbrook whispered to Emily. "I

don't like this seizure at all." And he hurried from the room.

Adeline Burchard clung to her young friend's hand. She said nothing. But her eyes sought Emily's with a look in which grief and happiness seemed strangely mingled.

When Doctor Gould arrived he promptly directed that the patient be put to bed.

"What is it, Doctor?" Hasbrook asked. "Is she in a dangerous condition?"

"I don't think it's really dangerous," the medical man said. "She seems to be suffering from some mental shock or strain. . . . You don't know of anything that's happened, do you, to bring this thing on? . . . No bad news from Hilary, is there?"

Hasbrook shook his head.

"I can't imagine what it could be. We were just standing here, talking—the three of us—about a bit of jewelry of Miss Fraser's that my gardener found to-day, and she suddenly collapsed. . . . By Jove! Miss Fraser had just told us some news, though! I'd forgotten all

about it, in the excitement." Hasbrook stopped short, then, for he reflected that perhaps Emily's disclosure was something she would prefer not to have mentioned indiscriminately.

Doctor Gould shot a quick glance at him. He saw intuitively that Alan did not feel at liberty to explain further.

"I don't see how it could have affected Miss Burchard in this way," Alan said. And Doctor Gould did not press him further.

The physician prescribed absolute rest and quiet for his patient.

"Miss Burchard's heart is not quite a normal one," he said to Hasbrook as he paused in the hall, on his way out. "But I think she's in no danger. I'm glad Miss Fraser's here. Miss Burchard seems to place great dependence on her. She won't hear of her leaving the room —can't bear to let her go out of her sight, apparently. . . . Are you sure that that news you mentioned has nothing to do with this attack?"

"Wait a minute, Doctor—if you don't mind,"

Hasbrook said. "I'll be back in a moment. Just step into the library until I return."

He hurried up the stairs; and after a brief conversation with Emily, which Miss Burchard could not hear, he joined the doctor again.

"Miss Fraser's given me permission to explain," he said. "I wasn't sure I ought to mention the matter to any one, without her consent." And in a few words he set forth Emily's story.

Doctor Gould gave a long whistle when Hasbrook had finished.

"That's it, beyond a doubt!" he declared. "Didn't you know that one of Miss Burchard's sisters—another aunt of Hilary's—was lost at sea, along with her husband and two children? . . . That was a long time ago. I was just starting my practice here then; but I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was a sad blow to the good lady upstairs. I haven't heard her mention the tragedy for almost twenty years."

"I do recall something of the sort—now that you speak of it," Hasbrook said slowly. "I

think Hilary told me about it one time, when I first knew him. But it had escaped my memory completely. . . . I suppose this story of Miss Fraser's brought all Miss Burchard's sorrow back to her again. . . . There's the locket, now—under the couch, where it must have rolled when Miss Burchard dropped it." He bent to pick it up.

"Oh! there was a locket, eh?" the doctor said quickly. Many years of diagnosis had served to contribute additional keenness to the physician's naturally alert mind. He had developed an almost uncanny shrewdness in detecting a significance in even the smallest things—details which the average person habitually passes over as being of no importance. "Let me see that locket, if you don't mind, Hasbrook."

Alan yielded it to him.

"You say this is Miss Fraser's locket?" the doctor asked, as if he had perhaps misunderstood Hasbrook's explanation.

"Yes!"

A curious, inarticulate sound came from the doctor's throat.

"Hasbrook—" he said, "I don't wonder Miss Burchard was overcome. And this is so entirely unexpected—so unbelievable, almost—that it's only natural you never suspected the truth. . . . Young man—the original of this portrait was Miss Burchard's sister."

Hasbrook looked at him in amazement.

"Then Miss Fraser——" he began.

"Is Miss Burchard's own niece!" Doctor Gould interrupted.

"It's impossible, Doctor!" Hasbrook exclaimed incredulously. "You must be mistaken. . . . There may be some slight resemblance. But you must be wrong. Things like this don't happen—outside of foolish novels."

"My boy—it's the gospel truth!" Doctor Gould insisted.

They stood there motionless for a brief space, regarding each other fixedly, while neither spoke. The doctor was the first to break the tense silence.

"See!" he said, holding out the locket to Alan. "Don't those features remind you of both Hilary and his aunt? The eyes are—unmistakably—Burchard eyes. . . . Why! Good Lord! can't you see that Miss Fraser (as she calls herself) looks enough like Hilary to be his sister? She's his cousin, of course; but there's even a stronger resemblance between them than you ordinarily find among cousins."

It was there—the likeness that Doctor Gould insisted upon. And as Alan regarded the small portrait again he became convinced, at last, of the truth of the doctor's assertions.

"We'd better tell Miss Fraser—don't you think?" he asked.

"H-m—I suppose so!" the other said. "We must avoid any trying scene for Miss Burchard. The shock of the discovery was undoubtedly a great one for her. I want her spared from any further ordeal if possible."

"I don't know how we're going to get Miss Fraser out of Miss Burchard's sight," Alan

said, doubtfully. "You've seen how Miss Burchard doesn't take her eyes off the girl," he added.

The doctor meditated for a few moments.

"I'll tell you how we'll manage it," he said shortly. "I'll go up there again and busy myself with our patient. And I'll send Miss Fraser out of the room on some pretext—some errand. I believe I can manage Miss Burchard to that extent. You wait outside in the hall and I'll leave it to you to explain the situation to the girl."

"Very well, Doctor!" Hasbrook agreed. He dreaded his task. But he was no shirker of responsibilities; and there was really no one else to whom he could reasonably entrust the breaking of the news. But for him the moment was fraught with misgivings. He felt helplessly inept. He did not know how to tell Emily the strange tidings.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that he had not long to deliberate. It was only a few minutes after Doctor Gould disappeared inside Miss

Burchard's room before Emily stepped into the hall.

Alan beckoned her to follow him into the curtained recess upon the landing of the stairs.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. There was a psychic influence astir which apprised her, vaguely but nevertheless unmistakably, that she was in the presence of something of great import.

"My dear girl—" Alan said—"my dear Emily—there's news for you—surprising news——"

"Is it about Miss Burchard?" she interrupted, fearful lest the doctor had made some distressing report to Hasbrook of Miss Burchard's condition.

"Yes—and about you, too!" he said. "But it's good news—not bad!" he added quickly. "You are Miss Burchard's own niece! You're Hilary's cousin."

And then Hasbrook instinctively did something that hours of reasoning would never have

prompted him to do. Under the circumstances it was quite the most fitting thing for him to do, too.

He took Emily in his arms.

CHAPTER XIII

A PRETTY CO-RESPONDENT

When Hilary Burchard returned from South America he was a much surprised man. Not only did he find himself the possessor of an unsuspected cousin: his acquisition of another—by marriage, at least—was imminent. For Emily and Hasbrook were formally engaged.

That poignant moment when he had taken her in his arms had unmasked to him his real feeling for Emily. He had known—all at once—that she was indispensable to his happiness. And having at last discovered that fact, which had so long been self-evident to others, Alan could see no reason for procrastinating any longer.

Happy as she was in the two-fold miracle

which had befallen her, Emily could not quite become reconciled to Alan's desire for an early marriage. She needed time to adjust herself to the altered conditions of her life. At last, however, in deference to Hasbrook's urging she agreed to be married early in the following December. That would give her time in which to find herself once more.

"And it will give you time to change your mind, too," she told Hasbrook, to tease him. "You may want to."

"Never!" he declared. "There's nothing that can come between us—I'm sure of that!" he asserted, positive, in his happiness, of their invulnerability to any sort of trouble or mishap—as is ever the way of lovers.

It seemed to Emily, later, that Hasbrook had challenged Fate; and that Fate had been waiting all the time to snatch up the gauntlet.

Hasbrook, scanning his morning paper at breakfast one day, saw something that startled and shocked him beyond words. This heading suddenly caught his eye:

"SUES ARTIST HUSBAND FOR DIVORCE. MRS. VAN WYCK MERCER NAMES PRETTY MODEL AS CO-RESPONDENT. CHARGES GAY PARTIES IN STUDIO OF FAMOUS ILLUSTRATOR."

His pulse leapt as a horrid fear came over him, though he reproached himself for his lack of faith. But his hands, clutching the paper, trembled as he read the quarter-column screed which followed. And there, in the sordid, insinuating account, which the copy-editor had crammed with "alleges," and "says," and "claims," and all the other well-worn subterfuges which the press employs in order to provide sensation for its readers, while avoiding libel suits for itself—there Hasbrook came upon Emily's name. So his intuitive fears were confirmed.

He left the rest of his breakfast untouched. And in the hour that followed, behind the locked doors of his study, Hasbrook passed through such torment as he had never imagined could

exist. Often, in his books, he had devised situations that purported to cause anguish to the characters he had invented. It struck him, now, how puny, how futile, had been his efforts to portray the tragedies of life. In this great moment he felt like some helpless atom, swept on to destruction by the irresistible forces of a universe in which all things were ordered by a controlling will whose inevitable program not the mightiest efforts of any finite being could alter one whit.

Hasbrook emerged from his study weary but triumphant. He had fought a bitter fight with himself. For much as he had wanted to believe Emily guiltless, nevertheless a suspicion would still come clamoring in his ears which required all his generosity and high-mindedness and chivalry to withstand—a suspicion that all had not been as it should be between her and Mercer.

He struggled against that insistent apprehension. He reproached himself for permitting any doubt to enter his mind. But the blow had struck at a fundamental quality that was in

him as in every other man. The old primal jealousy of the male had been latent in him—latent but just as inevitably present as it is in the most untutored savage. And Hasbrook found that it called forth his utmost efforts to still his distrust.

But in the end his better nature prevailed. He was weary, it is true, both physically and mentally. But a great calm possessed him. He felt sure of Emily—sure of himself. And now he wanted to see her at once. While he had battled, alone in his study, he had shrunk from the thought of ever meeting her again. Now, happily, he had conquered that aversion. He both loved and trusted her. And an overwhelming impulse seized him to tell her that his faith and love were both unshaken.

It was still early when Hasbrook reached Beech Knoll. He hoped that Emily had been spared the shock of reading the bald account in the newspaper. But one look at her told him that she knew.

"My dear!" he exclaimed. "I've come as

quickly as I could. It's distressing, I know. But it's just one of those things that have to be faced—and fought down."

"Oh! you believe in me?" she cried, for a gnawing fear had tormented her, and she had not dared hope that he would not cast her off like some unclean thing, as being too despicable even to be pitied, let alone loved.

"Believe in you! Of course I do, dear Emily!" he said. "But I'm distressed that you should have to suffer."

"Oh! that's nothing—now—" she told him. "I can endure—that. But I was afraid——" She could not finish.

"Listen!" he said gently. "I'd not be worthy of any happiness so long as I lived if I distrusted you. I know you're everything that's good and pure and noble."

She bowed her head upon his shoulder.

"At least, I'm not—not what everybody will think," she murmured brokenly.

"Everybody!" he protested. "Not a single person who knows you will believe you capable

of such a thing. Your aunt, and Hilary—they are just as sure of your innocence as I am. You know that?"

"Yes—" she admitted. "Yes! They believe in me, too, thank God! But you don't know how cynical New Yorkers are! They're always ready to think the worst of a person—always keen to snatch at a scandal and make the most—or the worst—of it."

"I know they're a rotten crew," he said savagely. "But we'll fight them, Emily. We won't let your good name be smirched, I promise you! That woman shall retract her accusation. I shall retain the best lawyer in New York to help us. And we'll never quit until Mercer's wife makes a complete disavowal."

Hasbrook lost no time in putting his purpose into effect. After a short consultation with the Burchards—aunt and nephew—he left for New York, to spend the greater part of the day in the offices of the well-known law firm of Messrs. Jamieson, Smithers, Knowlton & Reed. Mr.

Smithers himself accepted Hasbrook's case, along with a fat retainer. And when Hasbrook rode home that night it was with the satisfaction of knowing that no legal stone would be left unturned in the effort to turn the tide of scandal.

Van Wyck Mercer had joined eagerly in the conference. To Hasbrook's disgust, Mercer had appeared much more anxious to avoid paying alimony than to clear Emily's good name. But since the one end involved the other, he was an ally worth the having, no matter what motive animated him.

"Mercer doesn't at all object to his wife's obtaining a divorce," Hasbrook told Hilary, when they discussed the affair that evening at Beech Knoll. "It appears that he's quite anxious to be rid of her. But he wants to escape what he calls a life sentence of alimony. He says that if we can convince Mrs. M. that she has no case—at least so far as Emily is concerned—he hopes to be able to persuade her to take a lump sum from him in settlement, and

go out to Reno and get a decree against him on some pretext or other—desertion, or cruelty, or non-support. Mercer doesn't appear to care what sort of allegation she might make against him so long as he gets free of her cheaply enough. But he's afraid of a New York decree on statutory grounds. He says that in such an event his wife would demand a big alimony—and probably get it."

"But how can you scare her off?" Hilary Burchard asked anxiously.

Hasbrook made a grimace before he answered. The filth he had wallowed in that day was nauseating. But he had never faltered, distasteful as the business had been.

"It appears," he said, "that Mercer's wife is not altogether a lady of irreproachable morals—at least that's what Mercer claims. He says he has evidence in his possession that will make her change her tactics promptly, as soon as he shows his hand."

"What a life those people lead—don't they?" said Hilary. "And poor Emily never knew

that Mercer was married. I suppose Mercer and his crowd slip into marriage and out of it so frequently that it all becomes an incident of small moment to them.

"Probably they take it as a matter of course that a man has a wife somewhere—even if she's not visible—and never mention the fact, any more than you would discuss what you had for breakfast."

"That chap Langdon's paying alimony to two ex-Mrs. Langdons—so Mercer confided to me. I'll warrant Emily never knew that either," Hasbrook said.

"Well, Alan—I hope this thing will be cleared up soon. Aunt Adeline's terribly stirred up over it. And she had hardly recovered from the shock of finding Emily. . . . Do you take much stock in this assertion of Mercer's about his having evidence against his wife?"

"He tells a plausible story," Hasbrook replied. "You remember that Emily has told us that Mercer never liked Taylor Thorpe—

that the two always quarreled whenever they met?"

Hilary nodded.

"Well—it appears that there was a reason at the bottom of their antipathy. Thorpe's the surprise Mercer is going to spring on his wife."

Hilary Burchard whistled.

"What a mix-up!" he exclaimed. "Now I begin to understand how Thorpe and his kind can write the sort of story they do and how artists of Mercer's stamp can illustrate them. They depict perversion because that's what makes up their daily life."

"I suppose you're right," Hasbrook said thoughtfully. "And no doubt there's a vicious circle established. Probably their indecent work reacts on their own characters, too. And so they go from bad to worse. . . . I tell you, Hilary, it's pretty good proof (if any were needed—and none *is*, thank God!) of Emily's sweetness and purity and innocence, that she was able to associate with such carrion and yet remain unsullied.

But as he drove home from Beech Knoll that night Hasbrook breathed a prayer of thankfulness that Emily had been given into their safekeeping.

CHAPTER XIV

SIDE-LIGHTS ON MODERN MARRIAGE

MERCER'S shrewd prediction as to his wife's change of front—once he should hold over her the threat of a counter-suit, in which Taylor Thorpe would figure prominently—was soon proved to be well founded. In the course of a few days Hasbrook received a letter from Smithers in which the lawyer informed him that Mrs. Mercer's action had been summarily dropped. And the wily legal light succeeded in getting the newspapers to publish a news-item to that effect, together with what served as a retraction of Mrs. Mercer's allegation against Emily.

Hasbrook was jubilant. The clouds had been rolled away even more quickly than he had dared hope.

Emily, too, reacted under the good news. She had felt happiness with Alan slipping out of her grasp, while she was powerless to prevent the calamity. She had tried to be brave; but it had been difficult always to appear cheerful, when her heart was near to breaking. And now that the strain was over it seemed to her that she was the most fortunate girl in the whole world. Had she not seen her lover put to the supreme test? And had he not remained steadfast where many another man would have faltered?

There was much to be done during those glorious autumn days. Most important of all were the walks and drives with Alan. The bond between them had grown only the stronger, as if the test to which it had been subjected—in the acid of accusation—had made it all the more enduring. Busy as Emily was with the thousand and one details that occupied her—for now she counted the time to her wedding day by weeks, instead of months—she would not relinquish those precious hours with Hasbrook.

Dressmakers and milliners had to await her pleasure. To be with Hasbrook was supreme happiness for her and something that she would not deny herself.

Alan, too, was more keenly appreciative of his blessings, which he had seen all but snatched away. That terrible hour which he had passed, half-frantic, alone in his study, while he battered down the devils of doubt that assailed him —that hour had brought home to him a clearer realization of what Emily meant to him. Always somewhat serious of old—somewhat preoccupied—he surrendered, now, to the sheer joy that Emily's mere presence inspired in him. And the world seemed beautiful to him, where it had impressed him before as stern, pitiless, and filled more with pain than happiness.

As he waved good-by to Emily and Miss Burchard from the platform of the railway station one day, when he had brought them down in his car from Beech Knoll so that they might go to town on a shopping expedition, Alan told himself that he was a lucky man. He was still

young, he was healthy and strong, he was successful in the work he had chosen; he was even richer than he cared to be—but all that was as nothing compared with his marvelous good fortune in winning that wonderful wisp of a girl who smiled and nodded at him from the car-window.

When he reached home that morning, Alan Hasbrook turned to his work with an elation which he had never known before Emily came into his life and cast over him the witchery of her influence. Even his writing had changed of late. There had crept into it a buoyancy and freshness which surprised him, reflecting the change that had been worked within him. There was an optimistic note now that rang throughout the pages of his novel-in-the-making, as if its author were no longer obsessed by the theory that all was wrong with the world.

In short, Hasbrook was himself sensible of the fact that his writing had become constructive rather than destructive. Where he had ruthlessly torn down the shams of civilization

and left humanity to wander blind and helpless in the chaos he wrought, now he set to work with a splendid courage to remedy the conditions of his fellow creatures—to devise means for their economic betterment, which would contribute to both their moral and their physical well-being. So Hasbrook the iconoclast was dead; Hasbrook the practical optimist had taken the place of that somewhat gloomy individual upon whose shoulders the sins and the sorrows of the world had weighed so heavily. And Alan was convinced that it was Emily who had brought about the transformation.

In New York Emily and her aunt willingly yielded themselves up to a veritable orgy of shopping. There were hats to be tried on, and furs to be tried on with the hats—to make sure of the proper effect of both; there were soft suitings to be examined, and sheer silks and filmy veilings. Indeed, there seemed no end to the treasures the shops held. *Mesdames* with unmistakable Celtic complexions, which the

most prodigal applications of powder could not conceal, and pale *messieurs* with aquiline noses who knew their Harlem far better than their Paris—such were the priests and priestesses who interpreted for Emily and her aunt the mysteries of the goddess Fashion.

Emily flushed under the excitement of all the wonders that she saw. Miss Burchard was determined that her trousseau should not only not be lacking in even the smallest accessory; she showed plainly that nothing was quite good enough for her niece.

"My dear!" she exclaimed in answer to Emily's protests, "why should I deny myself this pleasure, when it's something I've longed for all my life, and never dreamed would be realized? I *will* have my way. Nothing shall stop me. So you may as well be reconciled. . . . After you're married you may do as you wish about these matters," she continued with a smile. "But now my whims must be indulged. Just think of the years I've been without you!"

Emily's eyes filled, despite her aunt's banter-

ing air. She was more touched than the older woman guessed.

They were just leaving a small and exclusive shop far up Fifth Avenue and had scarcely rejoined the stream of people on the pavement when some one called Emily's name. It was Violet Bement, a girl who had occasionally posed for Mercer and who had since attained to a more lucrative—if decidedly more strenuous—profession by becoming a moving-picture actress.

"My, but you're looking swell!" Miss Bement greeted Emily. "I've been meaning to look you up for a long time—and especially since that news I saw in the papers not long ago."

Poor Emily did not know what to say. She murmured something mechanically about being glad to see her old acquaintance.

"Well, dearie—you're one of the lucky ones," Miss Bement continued. "Of course, I can't complain, myself, now that I've landed right. Still, I have to work hard for what I

make. But you're in soft, Emmy, dear. . . . Say! I suppose you and Van will get married, soon as the madam gets her papers?" The girl looked at Emily knowingly.

Adeline Burchard felt the white heat of righteous indignation surge over her as she listened to the tawdry Miss Bement's well-intentioned observations. But Emily's aunt kept a tight rein on herself. She rescued her niece forthwith, before Violet Bement had time to say anything more, and bore Emily away, leaving the astonished moving-picture actress to gaze after them indignantly.

But the damage had been done. Emily's afternoon was spoiled. She forced herself, somehow, to visit more shops with her aunt. But the wares flung out before her no longer attracted her. She looked at them listlessly, with the manner of one who only half comprehended what was going on.

Adeline Burchard was quick to perceive the change that had come over her. And she was astute enough to realize that the business of se-

lecting a trousseau is a sorry matter when the little bride-to-be has a heart-ache.

"There, my dear! That's positively the last shop I shall go into to-day!" she declared, as if she, and not Emily, were the one whose mood precluded further purchases.

Emily pressed her aunt's arm gratefully. But even Adeline Burchard did not divine the resolution that had entered her pretty niece's mind.

Hasbrook had arranged to be at the station with his car late in the afternoon, to meet Emily and her aunt and drive them home to Beech Knoll, where he had been invited to stay for dinner. But Emily's altered mood upset the prearranged schedule of the two shoppers. They left town earlier than they had intended and went directly home, to telephone to Hasbrook the news of their arrival.

He appeared at dinner time, in the best of spirits. His day's work had gone well; and he looked forward to a most agreeable evening.

But Alan soon perceived that there was an atmosphere of constraint at the Burchards' house. To be sure, Miss Burchard was as hospitable and friendly as ever. But he could not escape the feeling that Emily's attitude toward him had undergone a subtle change. He was utterly at a loss for an explanation. But he felt sure, none the less, that some barrier had been interposed between them. The old *camaraderie* was missing. And he thought that Emily adroitly avoided being left alone with him.

The dinner, under such conditions, fell far short of being the pleasure that Hasbrook had anticipated. Hilary was away; and since Emily's mood reacted upon Alan's, it required all Miss Burchard's accomplishments as a hostess to establish even a semblance of gayety.

That night, after Hasbrook had gone home, Emily said suddenly to her aunt—

"I wish we could go away somewhere, Aunt Adeline—just you and I together. I—I want

to see something different. Perhaps you'll think I ought to be contented just to stay here. I dare say I should. Certainly I hope you won't think I don't appreciate this home, and all you do for me."

"Dear Emily—of course I think nothing of the kind!" Miss Burchard hastened to assure her. "A little trip would do us both a world of good, I'm sure. I've always longed to have some one in my own family with whom I could go to places. But I've been so happy just in having you here with me that I haven't once thought about going away." Miss Burchard understood something of Emily's mood. She knew that the girl was troubled. And she thought that an outing in some strange place, where they would make new acquaintances and see unaccustomed sights would prove exactly the sort of diversion that Emily needed to set her confused mental state to rights. "Let me see—" the good lady continued—"how would White Sulphur Springs do? It's years since I've been there. I'd love to go there again.

At this season the mountains will be beautiful."

So the matter was settled.

"I want to go at once, Aunt Adeline," Emily said almost tearfully. She felt that she could not keep the upper hand of her surging emotions for more than another twenty-four hours, if she were obliged to remain at Beech Knoll.

"We'll start to-morrow," Miss Burchard promised. "I'll telephone to town early in the morning to one of the tourist agencies, for tickets and a hotel-suite. And we can surely leave here before noon. We'll have luncheon in New York, and spend a night in Washington. And the next day we'll go on to the Springs."

Emily was deeply grateful to her understanding aunt. She kissed the older woman and thanked her. And then she bade her good-night and went up to her room.

But Emily did not go to bed then. A task lay before her, which she must accomplish before she tried to rest. She must write to Alan.

Again and again she tried to set down on paper the message which she hated to send him.

Time after time she tore up her attempts and threw the fragments aside, to begin anew.

At last the feat was achieved. And having sealed her letter, she did a very strange thing, for a young lady who was going on a pleasure trip the following day. Poor Emily cried herself to sleep.

Although Alan did not know it, Emily and her aunt were already on their way to New York when a messenger brought Emily's note to him the following morning. He had a premonition, as he tore open the envelope, that there was bad news within. And his first glance at the message told him that the worst had happened. Then Alan Hasbrook read the letter from beginning to end while the words seared themselves into his brain with flaming distinctness.

"DEAR ALAN:

"It breaks my heart to cause you the pain that this note will bring you. But I am sure it is for the best. I must not marry you. Don't ask me why. I am going away for a time. Don't try to see me. Don't even write to me.

Just try to forget that I have ever existed for you.

"I am convinced that your love for me is great enough to make you want to respect my wishes. No doubt I will seem cruel to you, now. But afterward, when time has eased the wrench, please think of me as one who tried to do right.

"You are not the sort of man, I know, to falter under this shock. I know you will make me even prouder of you (if that were possible) by going on as if I had never come into your reckoning. Just because of me your work must not stop. *That* is the big thing in your life.

"I wish you well. Oh! you don't know all the good things that I pray will be yours. And they are not half what you deserve.

"EMILY."

He was shaken to the most profound depths of his spirit. There was no ambiguity about Emily's decision. She had made it terribly clear that all was finished between them. The reason—he wondered what her reason was. And an impulse seized him to rush to her, before she could escape him and ask her to explain. He caught up his telephone. And in another minute he had dropped it again, quite dazed by the news he had heard. A servant at Beech Knoll

had told him that Miss Burchard and her niece were already gone.

Should he follow them? The servant had told him their destination. . . . But there was Emily's request to him not to try to see her. It seemed a pitiful appeal, as he read it once more.

Why had she cast him aside? He searched his mind frantically for some solution. He reviewed the events of the past. . . . And a horrid thought came to him. Could it be that after all Emily and Mercer—— Good God, no! he told himself fiercely. But that dreadful possibility would come stealing into his head to torture him, no matter how hard he struggled against it.

For hours Alan Hasbrook suffered the torment that only a wracked mind can inflict. And in the end he steeled himself to the conclusion that he must let Emily go. There was a ring of inevitability about her letter. He knew that he still loved her. And loving her, he felt that he must bow to her will.

CHAPTER XV

NEAR THE SKY

THE two weeks' vacation of Emily and her aunt lengthened into three; and a fourth week was nearly spent before Hasbrook received any word of the absentees. Then one day he discovered in his morning's mail a letter postmarked "White Sulphur Springs." He fairly snatched at it in his eagerness.

The letter—it was a mere note—was from Miss Burchard. There was a trifling business matter that she asked Alan to attend to for her, since Hilary had not yet returned home. Alan was keenly disappointed, for he had hoped for news of Emily. But as he turned the sheet he discovered a postscript.

"Poor Emily has been ill ever since we reached here," he read. "Her trouble is akin

to nervous prostration, the doctors say—and they won't consent to her being moved at present. We all hope that in time the rest and change will benefit her."

That was all. But it was enough for Alan. His mind was made up instantly. Before the morning was gone he was on his way to West Virginia and the girl he loved.

"I knew you'd come," Adeline Burchard said, as Hasbrook grasped both her hands. "But you have taken your time about it, Alan." She led him to one end of the row of chairs that stretched the length of the hotel piazza, where they could talk undisturbed. "If I were a man, and in your position, I never would have waited so long," she added severely.

Alan was somewhat taken aback by his old friend's censure.

"But Emily distinctly asked me to leave her alone," he answered uneasily.

"Dear me! Have you lived so long and never learned that you must not take us women too

literally? One has to use his judgment in dealing with us. No doubt most of us mean what we say—when we say it. But what are women given minds for, if not to change them?" Miss Burchard's tone was positively bullying.

"Then you mean that Emily has changed——"

"Not so fast—you stupid man!" she interrupted, as Hasbrook broke in upon her reprimand. "I don't mean that at all. But what I'm going to try to make you see is this: if Emily is worth winning, she is worth working for. Isn't that so? . . . Well, then, has it never occurred to you to try to make her see things in a different light? I'm surprised that you have calmly accepted her decision and——"

"Calmly!" Hasbrook interrupted. "My dear lady—you don't know what I've been through. You don't know——"

"No doubt your vanity has been hurt," Hilary's aunt said maliciously.

"Vanity! How can you say such a thing?" he demanded in a grieved voice.

She dropped her sarcasm then.

"Alan—my dear boy—" she said, patting his arm, for she loved him like one of her own blood, "have you guessed why Emily decided not to marry you?"

"No!"

"Neither had I," she continued, "until she became ill. And then, when she was absolutely unnerved and hysterical I discovered the real reason. I suppose there are people who would criticize me for divulging anything that I learned under such circumstances. But I think it's only right that you should know. And when I tell you you ought to be proud—proud that you have won the love of a noble girl, who chose to sacrifice her own happiness rather than put any stain on her husband's name—no matter how innocent she was." Miss Burchard looked at her companion intently. "Emily made up her mind not to marry you," she said slowly, "because she thought she was branded forever by that Mercer woman's charge against her.

"I ought to have guessed it all a month ago," she said self-reproachfully. "You remember Emily's going to New York with me, the day before we left home? . . . She met some awful girl on the street who said things to her, assuming that the worst was true, you know. And that made Emily think that she had no right to marry you. She thought that the scandal would be sure to follow her and involve you. It appears that she decided she would be only a drag on you—that because you married her people who didn't know you would jump at the conclusion that you were not all you ought to be. Oh! I don't know all the evils that Emily conjured up in her poor little head as likely to grow out of the marriage. She was afraid the public would think you no better than all that fast set of writers she used to see in New York, and she was convinced that people would say you were a hypocrite and that your career would be ruined—and with it your opportunity for doing good in the world."

Hasbrook was deeply moved as he listened.

"But what can I do to convince her that she was wrong?" he asked.

"I have a plan," she told him. "It will take time. We must all be patient. But it's worth trying. . . . Oh! I do so want to see you both happy, Alan!

"In the first place," Miss Burchard said, when she had quite recovered her composure, "I shall ask Emily to assume her father's name, to which she certainly has every right. She had not thought it advisable, in view of the fact that she expected to be married so soon. She said it seemed absurd to go about under a new name for only a few weeks. But I shall persuade her to my view, now, in spite of my hope that before many months have passed you two may be happily married. You see, a different name, which she can so naturally adopt, will be an important step toward separating Emily from the associations she formed in New York. As Emily Willis, Hilary's cousin, she can meet all our friends without feeling that her name will call to their minds any unpleasant

gossip. And once she becomes acquainted with plenty of decent people and begins to realize that they accept her without question for what she is—a pure, innocent girl—I really believe that she will gradually acquire a less morbid view of that Mercer episode.

"I'm sure my plan will work out successfully, if only we give it time, Alan," Miss Burchard said to him, while he listened eagerly. "Nobody but evil people could think evil of Emily. And it must be our constant duty to see that she is fended from those old associates of hers in New York. One unfortunate meeting might undo all our scheming. This is a psychological undertaking, you see. . . . I hope you have as much faith in its promise as I have."

Hasbrook thought that her plan was decidedly worth the trying. They discussed it with Doctor Merrihew, under whose care Emily had been placed. And to Miss Burchard's satisfaction—and Alan's delight—the physician pronounced the stratagem to be feasible.

"When the young woman has somewhat re-

covered her poise you may see her," he told Alan. "But not now. Let her become accustomed, gradually, to hearing something of him," he explained to Miss Burchard. "A casual word or two now and then is enough at the beginning. And as time goes on I see no reason to suppose that she will not be able to meet him as any other person. But for the present he ought to go away. Send her some little thing occasionally, if you like," he told Alan—"flowers, fruit. Then come back in a month and we shall see—what we shall see," he said with an enigmatic but nevertheless encouraging smile.

Straightway the conspirators put their designs into effect, with the result that the strain to which Emily had subjected herself was gradually relieved. By the time Hilary joined his aunt and his cousin at the famous resort at which they had been in a sense marooned, suggestion had so far done its work that Emily had progressed far toward recovery. Indeed, her aunt thought it hardly necessary to let Hilary

into the secret. She preferred, then, to allow him to talk about Alan as much as he pleased, for she knew that he would be entirely free from the self-consciousness which she herself always experienced whenever she mentioned Hasbrook's name in Emily's hearing.

"Where's Alan, I should like to know? Why isn't he here?" Hilary had demanded, the moment he arrived.

"Oh! he's already been here once," his aunt said. She did not dare look at Emily, for that was the first news Emily had had of Alan's visit to the Springs.

"I should think he'd hurry up and come back," Hilary grumbled.

"I dare say he will," said his Aunt Adeline, smiling. Still she did not look at Emily; but she wondered with all a woman's curiosity what that young person's expression might be.

And the next day Alan came.

The week that Alan had spent at White Sulphur Springs had wrought wonders in Emily.

The color glowed again in her cheeks; and the light that shone in her eyes bespoke a partial return, at least, of the joy of life that had impressed her as so marvelous before her illness descended upon her.

Hasbrook's presence had exerted a tonic effect upon her such as even her aunt had not dared hope for.

As Emily's vitality quickened, the wonderful autumn days began to call to her insistently. And when one morning Alan proposed a horseback ride she hailed his suggestion with enthusiasm.

So they set forth—three riders, Hilary, Emily and Hasbrook—and made their way along the valleys, across shallow fords, and then up winding, hilly roads which brought them at last to an eminence where they rested and drank in the glories of the mountains. It seemed to Emily that the distant crags, jutting defiantly from their sullen, fir-screened buttresses, bright here and there with the flame of yellowed tree-tops, beckoned to her to leave

the lowlands and strive with them to reach the heavens.

A wave of pensiveness swept over her. Did those ambitious peaks, doomed never to rise to the greater heights to which they appeared so bravely to aspire—did they typify the futility of mankind in striving to attain happiness, which seems always just beyond reach?

As Emily watched, she saw a vague speck rise slowly from a jagged crest and mount toward the clouds.

"See!" she cried, pointing to the moving object.

"An eagle!" Hilary exclaimed, when his eyes had found what Emily had seen.

"Like the spirit of the mountains," Alan said quietly, "communing with the sky."

His words filled Emily with emotion. Was it an omen? she wondered. Dared she hope that after all she was not earth-bound? Was it folly still to dream dreams?

Slowly they rode back to the hotel. And though Emily was silent much of the time, she

was nearer to happiness than she had thought it possible to be again.

The next day Hasbrook left for the North. There was work there for him to do, and much as he wanted to prolong his stay, his stern sense of duty would not allow him to remain longer. But he returned home with hope vastly reinforced. He had seen Emily and he was convinced that she was fast growing into her old self once more.

The autumn lapsed into winter. As December passed, Hasbrook watched the day upon which he was to have been married come and go. With a smile which was wistful and yet not altogether sad, he tore the date-slip off his desk-calendar. Perhaps one reason why he was not more downcast was because he knew that Christmas would bring the Burchard family back to Beech Knoll. They had gone further south, to Asheville, as the year waned; but now they were coming home again to spend the holidays beneath their own roof-tree.

Early each morning and late into the nights Hasbrook toiled over his writing. He was eager to see his novel finished. It was not only that he wished to snatch a short respite from work, in which to welcome the homecomers. There was another reason why he desired to write "The End" upon the final page of his manuscript.

New Year's day was not a fortnight past before his ambition was realized. One evening he placed in Emily's hands (she was "Miss Willis" now) a complete copy of his book.

"Oh! I'm so pleased!" she exclaimed. "I never knew that your novel was to be published so soon, until I came upon a review of it in this morning's paper. It was a splendid notice, too," she said, as she looked up at him joyously. "'An epoch-making work'—that was what the reviewer called it. And Hilary told us when he came home from town to-day that all the newspapers had praised it. He says it's by far the biggest thing you've ever done."

"That's what the critics are kind enough to

say," Hasbrook answered modestly. "They've stopped grilling me, at last. I know that I've put into this novel the best that was in me—I always try to do that. And if this is an advance over my other books I can only account for that fact by explaining that I've come under a more vital influence. . . . Turn to the dedication page, please, Emily," he said. "You'll find that I have given credit where credit is due, my dear."

My dear! It was months since he had called her that! And Emily's fingers shook ever so slightly as they turned the leaves at the front of the trim volume.

"To E. F.," she read, through eyes which were wide with wonder, "to whose nobility and unselfishness the author ascribes whatever force for good he may have succeeded in welding into this volume." The print blurred before Emily had finished the brief inscription. "To E. F.!" she stammered—"surely that's not——"

"It is—"he said gently—"it's you, Emily.

You'll always be Emily Fraser to me—until——" He hesitated, for he hardly dared put into words the hope which still lived in his heart. Then, as he looked into her radiant eyes he knew that he might finish. "Until you're Emily Hasbrook," he said softly.

.

Through the southern window the lovers looked down upon the Sound, where they caught glimpses of vessels, through the rifts where the ridges fell away. Distant as they were, Emily could see the flicker of their lights through the gathering twilight. She knew that those ships bore people—hearts both sad and glad, some of them seeking new fields for the fulfilment of their hopes; others, doubtless, returning weary and broken and beaten to the scenes whence they had once set gayly forth.

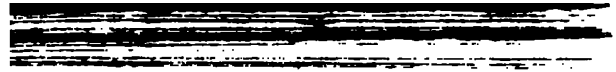
"Oh! I shall never want to go anywhere again!" she said to Alan passionately; and she clung to him like a child who has been frightened and has at last found comfort. "I want to stay right beside you—where I can put my hand

out and touch you and feel that you're close by, to take care of me. . . . You'll never know how I've missed you, all these months!"

"I've been alone for half a lifetime," Hasbrook told her—"but never so lonely as since you left me, Emily."

And so they stood there, looking off across the undulating hills, toward the shimmering strip of sea.

THE END





OCKER
SEP 14 1984



OCKER
SEP 14 1984